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# THE SAND KINGS OF OMAN

*being the experiences of an R.A.F.*
*officer in the little known regions of*
*Trucial Oman Arabia*

*by*

RAYMOND O'SHEA

*With sixteen illustrations*
*and two maps*

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THIS RECORD
of my Travels and Excursions
in Trucial Oman Arabia
I dedicate to
MY WIFE
who patiently endured unsociable
evenings while I wrote it, and to
GERALD WELLESLEY,
in memory of a war-time friendship.
La Rue Pons-d'Amour, Arras, 1939–40

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# PREFACE

000 THIS book, which is a factual account of my experiences whilst serving on the Trucial Oman coast of Arabia in 1944 and 1945, is not intended to be a geographical, historical or ethnological treatise. It is simply a travel book, or, perhaps more accurately, a diary of my day-to-day life written in narrative form. I do not claim that it contains anything new or unfamiliar to the reader of Arabian travel lore, although this great desert land is still little known to the world at large, and the Oman peninsula least of all. If, in the course of my brief sojourn and my wanderings across the Oman deserts, I have gleaned fragments of knowledge which are of value to science, this is purely incidental, since I have neither the knowledge nor the training necessary to collect and classify data in a manner which would satisfy museum authorities.

My interest in the Arabs was stimulated by the extensive literature on the subject which I had read, and also because to any student of world affairs the political events of the Middle East have assumed an importance which it would be foolish to deny. At any moment the spark of fanaticism, fanned to flame by agitators and *agents provocateurs*, may spread a conflagration throughout the Arab world, and it is as well that we should know something about these 30,000,000 peoples which compose it. As far as possible I have avoided discussion of political matters, confining myself to a description of the topography, races, customs and industries of the Persian Gulf; but the question of British influence and interests in the region are so predominant and so closely interwoven with other aspects of life that it has been difficult to avoid occasional reference to the subject.

Whilst no pretence is made to style or fine writing, I have read through the script very carefully and have revised and amended several portions; I believe it to be reasonably accurate and to reflect exact conditions as they existed in 1945. If some of the experts are unable to agree with my conclusions and inferences, particularly as regards the origin of the Arab race, I would reply that this is a point still open to speculation and theory, and that my guess is as

pvii [pvi is blank]

000 good as theirs. To a number of people, several of whom are mentioned in the book, I am indebted for the help and information they have given me, especially to the Khan Bahadur Abdur Razzak, formerly British Residency Agent at Sharjah; to Mr. Williamson, geologist to the Basrah Petroleum Company; and to Captain Richard Bird, of the Political Service; I am also very grateful to Mr. John Fry, Librarian of the British Overseas Airways Corporation at Whitchurch, for his invaluable assistance in reading through my manuscript and suggesting improvements.

114 I was only one of many R.A.F. officers, seconded to the B.O.A.C. during the war, who held administrative posts on civil air routes throughout the world, and in tribute to their untiring efforts and unrewarded zeal in maintaining a constant flow of supplies to our armies in the Far East, I cannot do better than quote from an article which appeared in *The Times* of 6th January, 1945.

000 'Some of the loneliest war-time jobs are those being carried out by British Overseas Airways staff at remote points along their 70,000 miles of overseas routes. War conditions force these men to remain at these outposts for long periods, often without a single day's leave for months, and with few contacts with the outside world.

'At some of the wayside stations there are only two or three Europeans, and for some a brief chat with the flying crews is their only contact with other white men for weeks at a time. There are some of the lesser used stations where only an occasional aeroplane puts down for half an hour to refuel. There are thousands of these lonely men up and down B.O.A.C.'s war-time routes. Their job is to see the mails through, to be part of the chain which is transporting necessities to the fighting men, and to serve along routes carrying ministers, governors, service chiefs, and hundreds of others on missions vital to the nation's war effort.

'Probably the toughest of these routes lies along the coast of Southern Arabia, on what is known as the Hadramaut route from Cairo to Karachi. The Hadramaut coast is wild and waterless. The men stationed at Riyan, some two hundred miles from Aden, call the place "Hell Spot". Also on this route are Sharjah and Karaman Island, often referred to as "Nobody's Island", where the only white man is Major D. Thompson, the civil administrator, whose only link with the outside world is a B.O.A.C. Lodestar, which sometimes puts down there to refuel.

'At these outlandish places the staffs have adopted a variety of hobbies. Some have hacked sports fields out of the scrub, using old packing cases as pavilions; some have trained natives to play football; others study languages and the habits and lore of local tribes, learn how to play native instruments, collect strange ornaments, go in for gardening, and literally make the desert blossom with flowers, fruit and vegetables.' ooo

This book may give the reader some indication of the life led by these men, whose hardships and loneliness I was privileged to share.

RAYMOND O'SHEA

BRISTOL,
November, 1945

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# INTRODUCTION

600 BEFORE the 1914–18 war, few European travellers ventured into Arabia, which was nominally under Turkish domination. Soon after the Armistice, following the fall of the Arabian ports on the Red Sea brought about by Colonel Lawrence and Hussein, the Emir of Mecca, and the collapse of the Ottoman Empire in the Near East, engineers began to build roads through the deserts which only caravans had previously crossed. In 1920, Nairn, an Englishman, established a regular 'bus service from Damascus to Baghdad; to-day services connect Jerusalem and Beyrout with the Tigris, and four-engined aircraft operated by the British and American air forces fly over the ancient ways of Babylon and Ophir.

The desert has yielded many of its secrets, and the huge oil refineries at Abadan, once a sleepy Arab port at the northern extremity of the Persian Gulf, belch forth black smoke into the azure desert sky. Yet little beyond the fringe of Arabia has been exploited by the white man, and vast tracts of the Hedjaz, Nejd and Hadramaut have never heard the voice of a foreigner. The British Isles could be engulfed in the formidable desert of Dahna, the least-known region in the world, whilst apart from the crossings of Mr. St. John Philby and Mr. Bertram Thomas, the Rub-al-Khali, stretching from Aden to Oman, with a width of a thousand miles, is a dead and waterless land comprising nearly one-third of the Arabian continent.

To many people Arabia is but a name conjuring up visions of stony deserts, camels and oases, and childhood memories of Haroun-al-Raschid, and though most of us are familiar with the sack-shaped country which divides India from Africa, lying between the Red Sea and the Persian Gulf, few could identify a particular region.
101 It is, therefore, advisable, in reading this book, to study a large-scale map of Arabia showing the small promontory, at the south-east extremity of the country and between the Persian and the Oman Gulfs, which is known geographically as the Trucial Oman Coast. The name 'Trucial' was first suggested by a naval officer, Captain

101 Brideaux, in the last century. Formerly this part of the coast was known in English official literature as 'The Pirate Coast', on account of the prevalence of piracy in these waters, although the Arabs call it *Sahil 'Oman* (Oman Coast) or *Shamal*, after the hot north wind which blows across the Gulf.

648 175 In 1853, a Treaty or 'Truce' was signed between the British Government and the five principalities—Abu Dhabi, Ajman, Dubai, Umm-al-Quwain and Sharjah. This 'perpetual truce' provided for the entire cessation of liabilities at sea amongst the signatories and imposed on the British Government the duty of enforcing peace, and obtaining reparation for maritime aggression committed in contravention of the agreement. The sheikhs are, therefore, styled 'Trucial Sheikhs'.

A second treaty was signed in 1892, by which the sheikhs bound themselves not to enter into any agreement or correspondence with any power other than the British Government; not to permit without the sanction of the British Government the residence within their territory of the agent of any other government, and not to sell, cede, mortgage or otherwise give for occupation, any part of their territories, save to the British Government.

By these two treaties preferential, and almost exclusive relations were created between the British Government and the Trucial chiefs, and the former appears to assume the moral obligation to protect the sheikhs in so far as they may be endangered or disabled from defending themselves. It should be noted that, under the treaty of 1853, the trucial obligations of the sheikhs only extend to their maritime activities and not to the interior of their domains.

131 101 There is some disagreement amongst geographers as to the definition of the term 'Oman', which in some maps is made to cover the whole of the promontory as far east as Muscat. In practice, the Trucial Oman coast is that territory which lies to the west and south of the Western Hajar mountains, including the Shamailiyah range, and extends almost to Qatar and the Ar Rimal section of the Rub-al-Khali desert. East of the Hajar mountains, on the Gulf of Oman, the country is known as Oman, and is under the rule of the Sultan of Muscat, although sometimes the term Oman is applied to the whole of this promontory.

131 Upon the coast, Trucial Oman extends in the Gulf of Oman from Khor Kalba to Dubai, and in the Persian Gulf from Sha'am to Khor-al-Odaid. Inland its frontiers are more difficult to define, but they cover a considerable portion of the interior of the Oman

131 promontory. On one side it is bounded by a line running from Dubai and the village of Bai'ah on the east coast to Ras Sha'am on the west coast, and so divides it from the Ruus-al-Jibal district of the Oman Sultanate to the north; on another, by a line which leaves the Gulf between Khor Kalba and Murair, and excluding the Mahadah and Jau districts to the south, joins Khatam. Westwards of Khatam the inland limit of Trucial Oman is at the commencement of the Rub-al-Khali and Jafurah deserts.

133 Geographically, the Trucial Oman coast consists of a maritime belt, or taff, and islands; of inland plains, and of a mountain system. The eastern coast, that washed by the Gulf of Oman, is bold, somewhat resembling the coast of Ruus-al-Jibal, and the hills in places come down to the water's edge. The western coast, lying within the Persian Gulf, is low and monotonous, although in the north it is diversified by occasional date groves, especially by those of the Sur tract between Rams and Ras-al-Khaimah, but as the coast trends away to the south and west the trees languish, and at Abu Dhabi they cease altogether. The hills also, which at Ras-al-Khaimah town form a pleasing background, rapidly recede inland and are soon lost to view from seaward as the coast is followed to the south-west.

Salt-water creeks abound on this coast, and the lagoons of Ras-al-Khaimah town and near the town of Abu Dhabi have a considerable superficies, yet there are no inlets of real importance. At Dubai there is a fairly large creek which is used as an alighting area for flying-boats, and another at Sharjah town, which is too shallow even at high-tide to be of any use. The creeks sometimes unite inland to form backwaters and mangrove swamps, which are separated by a short distance only from the coast; and quasi-islands, some inhabited and some not, are created in this manner.

Beyond Abu Dhabi, as far as Khor-al-Odaid, the coast is almost unknown; it is barren and generally low, but has some bluff headlands. The only eminence and conspicuous landmark on the coast of Trucial Oman, Dhafrah being excluded, is Jabal-al-Ali, in Dubai territory. In the Gulf of Oman the sea is deep and at no great distance from shore, but in the Persian Gulf it is open and free from dangers if somewhat shallow; here the coast lies open to the full fury of the Shamal, but there are no harbours or sheltered anchorages except for boats, and landing is often difficult. West of Sharjah the coast is a labyrinth of islands, shoals and reefs, imperfectly surveyed and so intricate that even Arab vessels, if larger than

133 pearl boats, avoid these waters. It is here that the principal Oman pearl banks lie. The most important islands off the Trucial Coast are Bu Musa, which contains a red ochre mine; Tunb; Sir Bu Na'air; Yas, where there is an R.A.F. emergency landing ground; and Dalmah.

132 The climate is extremely severe in the summer months. From May to October, the combined heat and humidity are very trying to Europeans; temperatures of 115° F. and humidity of 98° are common. In the winter months, from November to February, it is pleasantly cool by day and cold at night, but frost is unknown; at this time the weather on the coast is frequently boisterous. Rainfall averages about 5 in. a year, and falls chiefly in mid-winter, when storms are extremely severe. On 30th November, 1944, the Indian Meteorological department at Sharjah recorded a rainfall of 1.75 in. within twenty minutes and a wind of 78 miles an hour.

162 Tribally and racially the people of the Trucial Coast are very mixed, Arabs, Persians, Baluchis, Hindus, and a large number of Arab slaves and their progeny forming the bulk of the population. The Bedouins, who some years ago were estimated to number 8,000, are mostly confined to the open desert, although they are now more amiably disposed to the settled tribes and townships than formerly; the largest of the Bedouin tribes in Oman is that of the Beni Qitab, whose ruler is the Sheikh Mahommed bin Ali. The Bedouins live chiefly by their livestock, although some nowadays take part in pearling and fishing during the season. In winter time, when there is a fine amount of herbage for their herds, they scatter and move from encampment to encampment, but in summer they congregate in large numbers around the more copious wells in the desert. The Jiri plain in the north and Bainumah in the west, are favourite places.

241 There is little agriculture in Trucial Oman. Dates can be grown in most places, although the Arabs are extremely conservative and are averse from attempting new projects. The only large-scale date plantations are at Falaj-al-Ali and Djaidh. Inland, west of the Shimailiyah mountains and the Sir Wadhi, some cereals, wheat, tobacco and *jowari* are grown, and vegetables can be raised by means
231 of well irrigation. Cows, donkeys, camels, goats and sheep are kept, and plenty of poultry, but little appears to be known of diseases of the latter, and in 1944 they died in large numbers. The normal food for cattle is fish and boiled date stones, and herbage when it can be found. Except for the famous stables of Sheikh

231 Raschid of Al Ajman, horses are not kept in Oman on account of the difficulty of obtaining suitable fodder.

433 The industries of the Persian Gulf are pearl diving, fishing, a limited amount of canning for export, date cultivation, shipbuilding, ochre mining, and wool-weaving, but of these the pre-
228 eminent industry is that of the pearl banks. In summer most of the
464 able-bodied men repair to the pearl banks, some returning in
November to take part in the fisheries, although the majority stay at home in idleness and are supported by means of loans advanced by the boat owners and contractors. Having 'subbed' on their next season's wages, they are legally bound to work for the same pearler, and the system is such that they are in effect bound to him for life. It is no uncommon thing for a contractor to claim the services of a son whose father has been killed by a shark, or drowned, in liquidation of the debt owed by the deceased diver, and the whole business starts again through the next generation.

In July, 1944, I saw a diver who had been mauled by a shark eighteen feet below the water. His calf and the thigh of one leg had been bitten away to the bone, and he had spent five days in a
[752] dhow before being brought in. The wound, which had been
soaked in henna, was very putrid and full of maggots. He was placed in the sick quarters and the maggots were allowed to continue their work of devouring the rotten flesh. Within six weeks the wound had healed up sufficiently for the man to go home. He said he would return to diving again as soon as he was well!

2: O'Shea G-3 (1944-1945) 1947 MK4 Trucial Oman MK4

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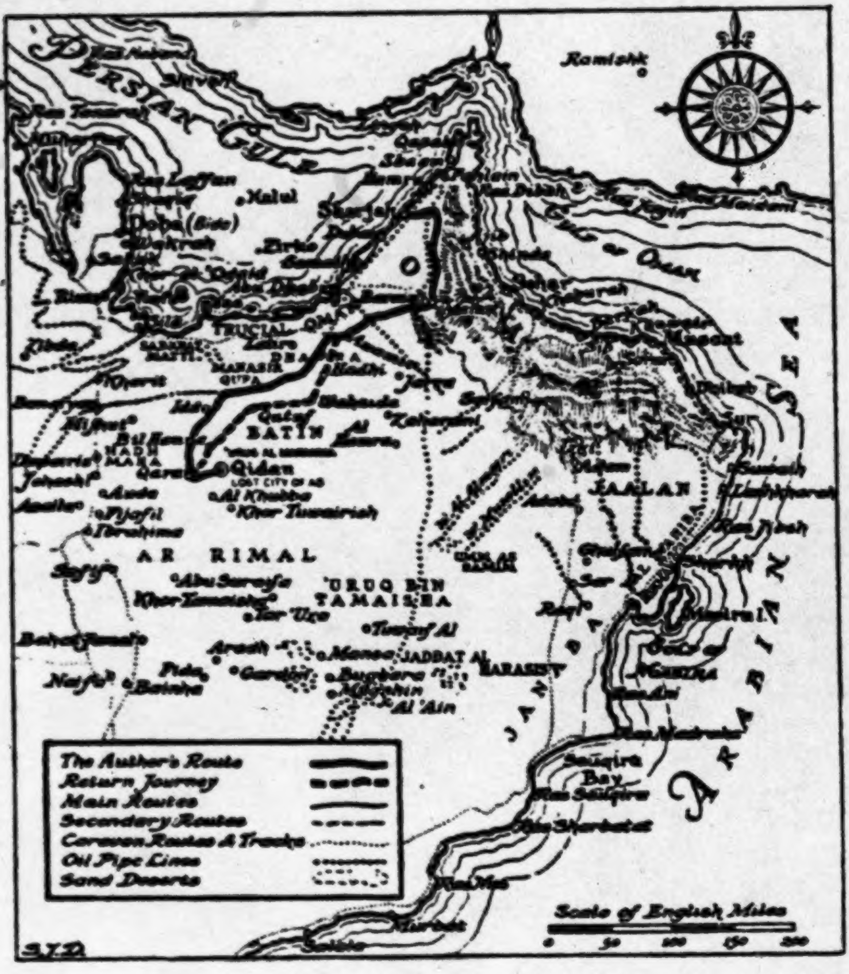
PERSIAN GULF
Ramishk
Ras Laffan
Halul
Doha (Bida)
Wakrah
Zirko
Sharjah
Abu Dhabi
TRUCIAL OMAN
O
Gulf of Oman
Sohar
Muscat
Sur
ARABIAN SEA
Qidan
LOST CITY OF AD
Al Khubba
Khor Tuwairiah
Zohra
BATIN
Al Ma'amura
AR RIMAL
Abu Suraifa
Khor Tamaisha
'URUQ BIN TAMAISHA
Tor 'Uzo
Tumruf Al
JADDAT AL HARASIS
Araath
Gardien
Al 'Ain
Naifa
Baiaha
Safyia
Fijafil
JA'ALAN
Masira I.
Sauqira Bay
Ras Sauqira
Ras Sharbatat
Mirbat
Salala
JANBA
The Author's Route
Return Journey
Main Routes
Secondary Routes
Caravan Routes & Tracks
Oil Pipe Lines
Sand Deserts
Scale of English Miles
0
50
100
150
200
S.J.D.

# BOOK ONE

## *RAS-AL-KHAIMAH*

## CHAPTER I

I see in brown Arabia the sand,
The faithful sand that I shall never tread.

COO THOSE lines, written by Arthur J. Bull in a poem called *Map of the World*, were chosen to preface this chapter because to my mind they crystallize the romantic, sometimes pathetic yearning which many people feel for distant lands. Of all countries, it might be said, Arabia holds the deepest enchantment for the majority. From the time of the Romans, who sought for the mysterious land of Ophir, reputed by legend to be a stronghold of gold, rare spices and pearls, to the nineteenth century, when its arid hills and waterless dunes attracted such men as Sir Richard Burton, Charles Doughty and the Swiss, Burchardt, Arabia Felix and its bordering kingdoms have captured the imagination of travellers, explorers and writers. No less has its appeal, the appeal of the unknown, proved a lure to a vast legion of readers.

To explain this fascination would not be difficult. For many centuries Arabia remained an uncharted land. Long after the interiors of China, Africa and the South American continent had been explored, it was still a closed book to all but a handful of explorers. Apart from the coastal fringes and the larger cities and centres of population in the north and south-west, which were made familiar to Europeans through the voyages of the merchant adventurers, the hinterland of Arabia, its vast deserts and mountain ranges, remained until almost the last century a land of blank spaces on the map. It was the Turkish conquest which first began to open this vast territory to Western knowledge, and even then to other nations its interior was as exclusive as China during the Manchu dynasty. The war of 1914–18 broke the crust of Arab aloofness, when the desert legions of Col. T. E. Lawrence crossed

000 over from the Hejaz, enlisting the aid of the princes and their armed bands, to drive out and vanquish the Turk invader.

After the Armistice Arabia, like so many 'sweet mysteries' man had once cherished, tended to be taken for granted by the general public. No doubt the numerous publications on the subject (the most outstanding of which was Lawrence's personal record of the desert warfare, the *Seven Pillars of Wisdom*) in some measure accounted for this. But if Arabia ceased to retain some of its mystery, its fascination has never dwindled. Unlike some countries of the Far East, it is a fascination which is not lessened by travel. The spell which the desert casts upon those who come to know its barren and inhospitable interior is no mere fiction. The sand gets not only into one's eyes, but into the soul. A man may hate it, despise its infertile harshness, and long for the green fields of home, but in his heart there is always a delight when he recalls the sun setting in purple grandeur behind the dunes, or the tenuous shadows cast by a passing camel caravan.

114 Long before I visited Arabia I had absorbed much of the literature of the Middle East; not only such books as *Arabia Deserta*, but the more fanciful *Arabian Nights* and the poetry of the Persian poets, Omar Khayyham and Farazdaq. True, the works of Freya Stark, Bertram Thomas and Gertrude Bell helped to thaw the illusion of fantasy which I had imbibed, but there remained, and does to this day, a tincture of poetry in my outlook. Perhaps this is as it should be. If one is a geologist, one should regard a country from the age of its rocks, the mineral significance of its stratæ and formations. The botanist, seeking for flora and genera, would classify new specimens in the unemotional language of science. As I am neither of these, not even a specialist in anything save the interesting and adventurous, it is perhaps not unnatural that my own outlook was little different from that of the wide-eyed tourist. I had travelled in other countries, and had the advantage of being able to compare, say, Arabian village life with that of China or some parts of India, but my visit was fortuitous and had been arranged for me by the Government; I had no personal motive in going to Arabia. Like so many others during the war, I was sent, willy-nilly, and this record of my experiences and adventures is little more than an expression of my gratitude for the happiness they brought me.

000 Perhaps I was luckier than most in being sent to a part of the country less familiar to the world than the Yemen or the Hadramaut. Hundreds of travellers and business men, particularly in these days

000 of oil exploitation, have visited the interior of Central Arabia and the coastal regions of Basra, Kuwait, or the Hedjaz. The independent principalities of Oman, however, and the vast desert of Rub-al-Khali to the south-west, are not so well known. Large tracts of this region, several hundred square miles in extent, have never been traversed. Not only no European, but, in some cases, no Arab, has trod their lonely sands. St. John Philby, who describes his experiences with Scriptural clarity in *The Empty Quarter*, did indeed cross the Rub-al-Khali from Dhufar to Qatar, but since this vast desert is almost a thousand miles wide, his remarkable journey cannot be regarded as adding more than a fragment to our minute knowledge of this 'lost world'. Since then, Allied pilots and, in one instance, Italians who set out from Eritrea to bomb Bahrein and Abadan but who never returned to their base, have flown over the Rub-al-Khali and have contributed some valuable reconnaissance photographs and survey records, but the desert from Salala to Muscat and from Muscat to Bahrein still holds secrets which may possibly remain untold for a century from now.

131 The region known as Oman lies in south-east Arabia between the Persian Gulf and the Indian Ocean. In area it is about the size of Ireland. The inhabited portion extends from the Oman sultanate, north of Muscat, to the Tafurah desert in the west. The fort which was my headquarters at Sharjah, a small inland principality, was situated in what is known as the Trucial Oman Coast.

133 One normally thinks of the desert as being one vast expanse of sand, rather like the sandy plains of North Africa. In Oman this monotony of landscape is not so prevalent. From Ras-al-Khaimah, on the northern shore, to Muscat in the south, there runs a chain of mountains, in places fifty miles wide, with peaks rising to 8,000 feet. Mostly volcanic, they are composed of black basalt, igneous rocks and red sandstone, the different stratæ forming a picturesque
311 *mise-en-scène* when viewed from the distance. Inland, especially
137 in the winter months, the wadhis become foaming torrents and in the valleys the land is clothed in tender green; frankincense and acacia trees, broom and scented clover, yield a fragrance equal to the sweetest perfume of violets in a Devon lane. Then, scattered through this region in the vicinity of the wells, are large date plantations and village gardens verdant with pomegranate and fig trees. Even the desert itself could scarcely be termed barren, for it is mostly covered with various species of shrub and low, sap-filled plants of the stone-crop order. I have seen the most arid parts

311 suddenly merge into green as one walked over the sands, and come 137 upon a copse of tamarisk and camel thorn, with moss and grass and occasionally a type of dandelion, growing in their shade. ✓

000 To obtain a glimpse of this infinite variety of the desert, one should fly over it at two thousand feet. From this height one has an ideal panorama in which are focused mountain peaks of changing colour, shallow seas of pale jade green, and sands that vary from golden yellow to blood red.

My own entry into Arabia was by air. After two days' flight from Poole, with night-stops at Cairo and Bahrein Island, our Short Sunderland flying-boat crossed the Persian Gulf through thundery cumulus clouds and flew three hundred miles direct to 361 Dubai, a busy town ten miles south-west of Sharjah. The mountains suddenly gave way to a long, narrow creek, and we skimmed the low-walled town to make a smooth landing between the marker buoys. From the air the open-roofed houses looked as though they had been bombed, the shadows giving the sharp relief of inked-in squares. The gardens of the merchants were gay with feathery palms, and in the creek and harbour scores of dhows, with awnings of palm-matting, lazily skimmed the surface.

000 Our four-engined aircraft was speedily moored to the buoy—an operation requiring some dexterity on the part of the first officer, who has to hook the ring at the top of the buoy as the aircraft slowly taxies up to it; if he misses, the flying-boat has to make a second circuit or else taxi to another buoy. The passenger launch was already half-way across the creek, with the sun-bronzed coxswain at the wheel. He was a Scot who had spent two years in the desert and had never had a day's illness. The clean lines and trim condition of the launch were impressive, as were the Arab serangs, clad in blue jerseys and wearing piratical caps, who stood in the stern like guardsmen. The engines were reversed to enable the launch to glide slowly under the wing, and careful hands grasped the flying-boat's hull to prevent bumping. The door was opened and as soon as the traffic officer had clambered aboard with his papers and diplomatic mail, we were ushered aboard the launch. 486 Happily, there were none of the usual port formalities, for at Dubai there are no immigration, customs or passport requirements for air travellers.

000 As we chugged away from our silver-painted craft towards the tiny stone pier, I felt that we had suddenly drifted into another world—a world of azure, cloudless skies, pellucid green water, and soft,

pastel shades. Less than sixty hours previously I had walked 000 down Piccadilly in a mackintosh and made a shivering descent to the crowded Underground. The contrast provided one of those pleasant shocks that are all too rare in the average man's lifetime.

Being November, it was agreeably cool, although the sun blazed down from a hazy blue sky. One might have compared the scene with Camber sands on a hot day in June. As one walked down the pier towards the diminutive rest-house, the white coral houses of Dubai, which clustered on the shores of the creek, looked like Mediterranean villas; to the north, beyond the date groves and the fishermen's huts, the sands stretched flat and featureless towards the horizon. This, then, was to be my home.

As I sipped clove-flavoured coffee in the rest-house, and chatted to the passengers who were to continue the journey to India, I felt a momentary pang at being separated by so many thousand miles from the civilization I knew and liked. My nostalgia was short-lived. A traffic official sounded the small ship's bell and the passengers made their way back to the launch. In a few minutes the engines started up and the flying-boat roared down the creek, creating a cascade of foam before she left the water. She rose like a bird and was soon a speck in the sky.

The passengers gone, I had an opportunity of meeting some members of the small European staff of whom I was to be in charge at Sharjah. Apart from the coxswain, a six-feet Scot from Glasgow, whom everyone affectionately called 'Jock', there was a burly young Lancashire engineer, a traffic officer from Durban, and a radio officer. The others had remained at the Fort to attend to the land-plane services. I learned that I had, besides, a large Indian and Arab staff of clerks, bearers and coolies, many of whom resided inside the Fort.

Sharjah Fort was originally built to the design of Sir Christopher 712 Turner, an Army engineer, in 1933, for defensive purposes. In those days there was no flying-boat base, and a handful of Imperial Airways employees lived under more primitive conditions in the wilderness of sand, their one concern being to attend to the twice or thrice weekly services of Hannibal land-planes which stopped at Sharjah to refuel. I had a long line of predecessors, beginning with OXO Wade and Chance, Poynter and Clive Adams, who had pioneered the way and built up an efficient organization with little help from headquarters; it was my task to maintain this efficiency and cope

000 with the greatly-extended air services which had developed since those early days.

The radio officer came and reported that he had received the 'all clear' from the flying-boat. We locked up the rest-house, dismissed the serangs, and crowded into the two station wagons which were to take us the ten miles to the Fort. It was a tight squeeze, with bearers and clerks sitting on each others' knees in the back seat, but since transport is scarce in the desert, I found this was the customary way of travelling.

487 There was a track of sorts* beaten out by the wheels of countless vehicles, which wound its way around the sand dunes and the date palms. In hot weather the desert is as hard as a macadam road, and one can drive almost anywhere, but in the season of the rains flooding is frequent, and once you get stuck in a soft patch nothing less than a four-wheel drive truck with a crane will get you out.
133 So we stuck to the road and did a fairly comfortable thirty miles an hour through the most monotonous country I have ever seen. Fortunately the rest of the desert is not like this. Between Sharjah and Dubai the landscape is as flat as a table, and the sand a dun, muddy grey, without a single bit of scrub or camel grass to relieve it.

494 There was little activity on the road. A flock of black goats scattered as we drove past, the young herdsman casting us a scared glance. A fat merchant on a donkey, his bare legs almost touching the ground, trotted by, a dignified expression on his face which contrasted comically with his primitive mode of travel. Away to the dunes on our left, a train of loaded camels trudged majestically towards a Bedouin encampment, their riders carrying long, silver-chased rifles. Ahead there gleamed in the sun what looked like a wide, shallow lake. Our driver made straight towards it; as we advanced so it receded, and eventually it evaporated into the air.
[823] I have often heard it said that these mirages are due to heat reflection, but an old Arab whom I knew said they were caused by the salt crystals and silicates in the sand, which reflected the sun like a mirror. Science may not accept his theory, but I have often picked up large flakes of salt from the desert which sparkled like fragments of glass.

361 712 We approached the village of Khan, a small dependancy of Sharjah, whose minarets and white-walled houses appeared to float in the air like a fairy city—again the effect of a mirage. Five more miles and we skirted a high range of sand dunes and soon glimpsed the radio masts and white, crenellated walls of our fortress home. A mile behind it the dun stone walls of the sheikh's palace

*[Between Dubai and Sharjah, ca 10 miles apart —Analyst]

and the tower-topped houses and mud huts of the town rose to 361
view. 712

The fort gleamed dazzling white against a background of huts, tents and low stone quarters of the R.A.F. and Indian troops stationed at Sharjah. The massive iron doors in the south entrance, large enough to admit a fair-sized tank and painted silver with the legend 'British Overseas Airways' in letters of yellow-gold, were open. They had not been closed since the tribal war of 1940, and were rusted to the ground. One of my many minor tasks was to have them repaired and ready to shut at a moment's notice. Facing the entrance, and somewhat spoiling its imposing façade, were the shabby, coral-faced hutments of the R.A.F. Station Headquarters, with the U.S. Transport Command's meteorological building adjoining and, topping them, the square control tower shared by the two Allied forces. At the extreme end of this jumble of tattered offices was the U.S. latrine. It had been erected despite formidable opposition from the last Station Manager and, though in my opinion no worse an eyesore than the other domestic buildings, was hardly the type of edifice one would wish a V.I.P. to look at on leaving the imposing fort. But Americans are sanitary-minded, and we must bow to their idiosyncrasies.

Our convoy of cars swept into the courtyard and drove into the 000 open garage. Before going to my quarters I met the Catering Officer, an excellent chef. Lambert had been in the desert for nearly two years, but dust, sand and blinding sun had not dimmed the delectable arts of the kitchen which he had learned at the Grand Hotel in Brighton or aboard Lady Yule's fantastically luxurious yacht. His job did not end with superintending the preparation of food; he was in charge of all food supplies, refrigeration plant, and the furnishing and maintenance of the quarters; he ruled the Persian bearers with a kindly but iron hand, and the fort garden was also his responsibility.

The garden, which was enclosed by a stone wall three feet high, and which one entered through an archway burgeoning with bougainvillea, must be one of the world's smallest. I do not think it could have measured more than fifteen feet by thirty feet, yet it was symmetrically laid out with cement paths and flower beds gay with pink and white *vinker*, a local type of stock. In the centre was a ship's cannon, dating from the George IV period, probably stolen by the Arabs from a pirated wreck. It had bee[illegible] presented to Station Manager Clive Adams by the Sheikh of Umm[illegible]-Quain, or

000 so said the legend on the brass plaque. It is to be regretted that the staff and visiting Americans treated this relic with scant respect. Many a morning have I gone on my rounds to find the muzzle stuffed with empty beer cans and other oddments. Just before I left Sharjah, on 'V' day, there was a conspiracy to insert a charge of cordite or guncotton, fill the muzzle with nails and stones, and ignite the charge by means of a fuse. Fortunately, the primer was too rusted to enable this to be done.

This garden was Lambert's pride and glory. Every morning he would stroll out from his room, clad in nothing but a towel and sandals, and gaze in rapture at the mass of blooms he had encouraged to grow. That flowers did bloom in Sharjah at all was a tribute to his enterprise, rather than to that of the Indian gardener, Toni, who, when ordered to water the plants, invariably flooded the beds; or, when told to dig, dug everything up, roots and all. Toni was an excellent water-carrier, and little else, and he had to be watched with a vigilant eye; I could never understand how he had the effrontery to ask, at the beginning of each month, for a rise in salary.

My quarters consisted of a large, cool room adjoining the mess. The walls were pale green, and the stone floor was covered with two rich-hued Kermani rugs. The furniture, of Indian-made teak, was handsome, and I traced a feminine hand in the damask covers of the easy chairs and cretonne curtains. There was a recess for the wardrobe, and a tiny alcove for ablutions; but no running water, alas. In short, it was the sort of room the Dorchester might have been proud to offer a guest. I mention all these details, because it was hardly the sort of thing one expected to find in an almost unexplored part of the desert.

In the ante-room of the mess, a comfortable place equipped with easy chairs, a radio and some ancient copies of *Punch* and the *Tatler*, I met the remainder of my European staff. They seemed an agreeable crowd of men, and I began to look forward to my sojourn in Sharjah with pleasure. We had a short drink (drinks were very short there, owing to the difficulties in getting supplies), and went into the oak-panelled dining-room for lunch. The 'simple' meal, as Lambert dubbed it, consisted of an *hors d'œuvre*, soup, fish, chicken, beans and potatoes; a sweet (pancakes with lemon, I believe); cheese and biscuits; and coffee. Having just arrived from rationed England, I was flabbergasted at this prolificacy, but I soon found that this was quite a normal meal. One rose from them slightly comatose, and usually retired to one's room for an hour or 000 two's sleep.

In the afternoon I made a tour of the fort and visited the power house, where four Diesel turbines provided us, as well as the hospital and some other R.A.F. buildings, with electrical power.

This, together with the radio transmitter room, the carpenter's shop, the stores and the Indians' quarters, was in the new wing, added in 1939. It was cut off from the old building by the mess and kitchens. The original fort was half its present size and contained the passengers' rooms, bathrooms and lavatories, the radio office, food stores, traffic office and waiting room, and my own office. The fort was built of hard yellow sandstone bricks, quarried in the island of Abu Musa, about forty miles from Sharjah.

The walls were six feet thick, and the north-east and south-west corners were topped with embattled towers, the walls being pierced with loopholes for defence. Unfortunately in one of these towers the loopholes were the wrong way round, making a perfect target for the sniper and an uncomfortable site for the defender. Huge beacons, called Chance Lights, which revolved when illuminated, and smaller defence lights and searchlights, were installed on the walls and towers. When these were lit up, as they were during an alarm, they illuminated the surrounding desert for miles—a sufficient deterrent for any invading Bedouin, who prefers to crawl in the dark towards his sleeping foe.

During the first few days of my stay I had little opportunity of visiting the camp or the town, as I had to take over from my predecessor, Bob Allison. The act of 'taking over', as every Adjutant knows, often means poring over lengthy documents, going through masses of files, checking inventories and keys (some so rusty that they won't go in the locks, others which do not seem to fit any locks at all), and signing various forms each of which appears to be a duplicate of the other. Before Allison left he had to prepare a lengthy 'handing-over' report, which soon assumed the proportions of a small book, and which, indeed, did contain a short history of the region and some rather scandalous references to local potentates and their customs.

The evenings were far from dull, if one wanted to be sociable. It was only much later that I tired of conventional society and would go off on a lone desert prowl, or pay a visit to the sheikh or some of the local merchants. All the members of my staff who were of officer rank were automatically admitted to the R.A.F. officers'

000 mess; this was an agreeable change from our own rather restricted quarters, and it was pleasant to meet other men whom one did not see for twelve hours out of twenty-four. I am sure that my staff got as tired of my face as I grew of theirs, but they were very amiable about it.

The R.A.F. mess was a two-roomed building of coral and palm-matting, with simple saddle-back chairs and framed copies of the inevitable 'Varga' girls on the whitewashed walls. The tiny bar would have provided an admirable setting for a play of the *White Cargo* type. The walls above it had been decorated by a clever Service artist, and depicted Hitler, Goering and Goebbels with mephistophelian tails and pitchforks, being chased by nightmare aircraft with the heads of fabulous monsters. On the side of the bar was painted a humorous scene wherein two scantily-clad beachcombers, in little more than battered topees, and with complexions alcoholically bright, muttered to each other the well-worn phrase: 'It's not the heat, it's the humidity'.

Sam, the barman corporal, had amassed a variety of N.A.A.F.I. stores on the shelf behind the bar, and one could purchase anything from cigarettes to combs, toothpaste and sun-glasses. The array of bottles was imposing, but they contained nothing more alluring, alas, than coloured water. Owing to the rigid control of the Indian Government over food supplies, no liquor was allowed to leave that country, and we had to depend for our stocks on the meagre allowance of the N.A.A.F.I. Beer was a rarity, confined to Saturday nights, and if a bottle of Scotch suddenly appeared on the shelf it always disappeared before I could get near the bar. The usual drinks were Cyprus brandy and gin, which no self-respecting Englishman would dream of consuming if he were at home; an ersatz cherry brandy, Greek wine, and occasionally a Guinness.

We were a fairly sober lot, so the shortage of liquor did not greatly bother us. Perhaps it was just as well, because one is tempted to drink more in a hot climate, where there is little to do in the evenings, than one is at home. It was in the ante-room that I was introduced to S/Ldr. Cranley, the commanding officer of No. 44 Staging Post, which was one of Transport Command's more distant units. He was a jovial Ulsterman and a very capable commander, well liked by his men and esteemed by the senior officers at Headquarters. As I was still in the R.A.F. myself, being merely seconded to British Airways in a civilian capacity, I felt very much at home in this cosy little mess and shall always treasure some of the friendships I formed there.

Some of these men I shall refer to in a later chapter, and will only mention at the moment Captain Vernon Joyce, in command of the Locust contingent, who accompanied me on several trips into the interior. Joyce, who had held a post in Bangor University as an entomologist, learnt more about the Arabs during his short stay in the desert than many less-interested travellers learn in several years. He possessed the type of temperament and personality which never fails to appeal to the Oriental; a combination of calm courage, simplicity and a faculty for understanding the other's point of view. Perhaps the Arabs respected him the more because he wore native dress on his expeditions, and spoke their language; I know that they regarded him with affection. The Askhari guards who stood watch on the fort always referred to him as 'the wise one', and it was an apt description of Joyce's quiet and imperturbable mind. Among other things, he was a keen photographer and I am indebted to him for many of the photographs which appear in this book.

It was somewhat unfortunate that my arrival at Sharjah should have coincided with the rains. These were so heavy and continuous that the airfield was quickly turned into a lake, and our aircraft were obliged to overfly. This meant that for periods as long as two weeks we did not see an aircraft, were more or less confined to the Fort, and our efforts to reach the flying-boat base at Dubai were often attended by disaster. Never in my life have I ruined so many pairs of boots and shoes. Obliged to dismount from our vehicles and extricate the wheels from the mud, we had to wade up to the knees in water. After a few experiences like this, we used to remove our shoes and stockings and roll up our shorts, although this procedure had its unpleasant side, as the filthy water was usually crawling with insects, some of which stung and bit.

By some extraordinary piece of luck, we never failed to reach our objective and meet the flying-boat; but to achieve this was hazardous and involved all kinds of difficulties. The strain on the vehicles was considerable, and half-shafts would break at the rate of about four a month. Our drivers had many narrow escapes, for, although there were few obstacles in the desert, the sudden snap of a half-shaft on a vehicle travelling at thirty miles an hour or more is apt to be dangerous. These mishaps complicated our transport

OCO arrangements, as replacements were extremely difficult to obtain from Karachi, and we were reduced to removing parts from broken-down vehicles and borrowing from the R.A.F. and even from local sheikhs. The disadvantage of seeking the aid of the Arabs was that for every nut or screw borrowed they would expect something tangible in return—usually the loan (in Arabia, synonymous with gift) of a battery or major repairs to their ancient motor-cars, work which we were unable to undertake owing to the shortage of mechanics and spare parts.

On one occasion, owing to mechanical breakdowns and the stranding of two station wagons in the mud, we were reduced to one serviceable vehicle; the situation was so serious that when this solitary means of transport got embedded in a mud-lake half-way between Sharjah and Dubai, we had to summon a convoy of camels and donkeys. These, with the aid of about sixty natives, dragged the wheels out of the mud by sheer force and moved it on to dry ground. Eventually we arrived at Dubai half an hour after the flying-boat; fortunately a native coxswain had been on duty all night and had assisted the pilot to moor to the right buoy. The captain was not altogether pleased at the delay, as he was anxious to reach Karachi in time for a dinner engagement, but when he saw our mud-bespattered uniforms and perspiring faces he relaxed sufficiently to laugh at our plight.

It should be explained for the benefit of the reader who has never seen a flying-boat alight, that the procedure is for the senior coxswain to take the launch out before the arrival of the aircraft and inspect the buoys and the markers which line the alighting area. He then stands-by until the arrival of the flying-boat is signalled to the radio operator on shore. When the aircraft is first sighted—usually by a keen-eyed serang standing in the bows—the launch is taken to the spot where it will land and is then swung into wind, a red flag being flown to show the pilot the wind direction. It should be noted that, in addition to this he has other landing facilities, including a wind-sock or indicator, on shore.

The length of the alighting area is usually about 1,750 yards, which is sufficient for the 'C' class boats. After landing, the aircraft taxies slowly up to the mooring buoy, which is indicated by the coxswain. With an experienced coxswain who knows his job, the whole performance should be carried out smoothly, but a considerable knowledge of local tides and currents and an accurate judgment of wind-speed and direction is necessary. A careless

coxswain can not only delay the aircraft by giving incorrect or 000
vague directions, but can endanger both the aircraft and his launch. Yet during the whole of my stay at Sharjah there was only one occasion on which my Station Coxswain, Jock Frew, was charged with a minor error of judgment. He had given the pilot of a flying-boat a visibility of two miles. When the aircraft alighted, the pilot indignantly protested that he had been able to see clearly for twenty miles, and stated that he would report the coxswain for giving false information. Jock stoutly denied that he was in the wrong and he was supported by the R.A.F. Meteorological Office, which affirmed that local visibility that morning was, indeed, barely two miles.

Such were the pinpricks one had to endure in this isolated out-station. Of Jock Frew, however, I shall be content to remark that he possessed the keen judgment and conscientiousness of the ex-merchant sailor and Scot; and was, moreover, a loyal and lovable character. Although over forty, he had spent nearly two years in the desert. This would have sapped the energy of most men, but Jock had tremendous vitality and his love of his job and his philosophical outlook on life gave him exceptional resistance.

We had troubles other than those connected with transport. When the wild Bedouin tribes moved their camps, some of the more hostile tribesmen would take it into their heads to attack our vehicles. They would usually fire at the tyres and then rob the driver and passengers of any goods they had. To overcome this we used to co-operate with the R.A.F. and travel in convoy whenever possible, which proved a distinct deterrent. These attacks were never frequent and seldom serious, but they were a nuisance. The local sheikhs were appealed to but, whether through fear of Bedouin reprisals or incompetence on the part of their Arab 'police', they seemed unable to put down the menace. It was the American C.O., Major Raimer, who solved the problem by patrolling the desert with jeeps, the drivers of which were armed with tommy guns. As soon as this information had spread amongst the Bedouins, there was no further molestation of our cars on the Dubai route.

It will be gathered from my description of these experiences— 114
and they were a regular feature of our life—that the desert is not entirely the land of romance which certain travellers, especially those equipped with luxury motor-cars and expensive caravans, have described it to be in their lavishly-illustrated books. There is not an author of Middle East travel I enjoy more than Miss

114 Freya Stark, who is always interesting and whose descriptions of native life and architecture are fascinating and picturesque. But even this intrepid traveller is inclined to stress the poetical side of her experiences, and to leave out the realities of smell and dirt. For dirty and smelly Arabia is.

364 The villages have no drainage or sanitation; garbage and offal are thrown on a heap outside the houses, or on the sea-shore, there to be removed in time by those voracious scavengers, the vultures and kites. It is a common experience to see the carcases of donkeys and other livestock lying on the shore, swollen and covered with flies, decaying under the hot sun. The stench within half a mile of an Arab village is simply appalling; one would be truthful if unkind to describe the Arab as having no prejudices against filth. 515 In their persons the lower classes are extremely dirty by European standards, although they can scarcely be blamed for not taking baths, since water invariably has to be carried for several miles from the wells on the backs of donkeys and is, consequently, expensive. The Arab workers are very poorly paid, and prefer to spend their small earnings on food for their families, and the rare luxuries in which they indulge. The current belief that the Arabs 'wash' themselves in the sand is an anomaly. According to the [183] Koran they are supposed to carry out a certain number of ablutions during the year, especially during the fast of Ramadan and the anniversary of the Prophet's death. As water is scarce, they obey the Holy Book by making a token ablution with sand. Anyone familiar with the grimy grey sand one finds in the vicinity of a village will realize that, used as a 'cleansing' agent, it probably [14] contributes to the sores and skin infections from which so many of them suffer.

136 Another serious cause of infection are the flies, which breed in that climate on a scale to be observed nowhere else in the world. I have seen a plate of fresh dates carried a few yards from one room to another across an open courtyard. By the time it reached the second room it would be covered with a mass of flies at least two inches deep. Incredible to the insect-free European, this must be [264] seen to be believed. Yet the Arab would not think of cleansing food that had been thus contaminated. He nonchalantly sweeps away the flies with his sleeve and proceeds to masticate the polluted mess with relish.

136
366 Apart from the piles of offal and refuse which are a feature of every village, another inducement to flies are the windowless shops

in which dried fish, raw meat, ghee butter and other foodstuffs are 136
openly displayed. These goods are always black with flies and as 366
one drives through the narrow streets of the shopping centre a black,
buzzing cloud obscures the windscreen. In summer it is much
worse. The Arabs are curiously indifferent to this plague of dirt,
bad odour and insects, and will sit for hours outside the shops, idly
gossiping, while flies settle on their beards and faces, fall into their
Turkish tea, or get mixed up with their rice. It is almost impossible
not to swallow flies when one is talking, and the only remedy when
in these districts is to keep one's mouth tightly shut. I have seen
Arab babies lying in the open air, their eyes swollen and festered
from some disease and covered with flies. Trachoma and cataract [164]
are common troubles among the Arabs, and it is surprising that
epidemics of typhoid and dysentery are not frequent.

The blame for this state of affairs cannot be laid on the Arab 565
peasantry, who are illiterate, badly paid and poorly nourished. 511
They have been brought up for centuries in primitive surroundings 177
and have come to regard their way of life as natural and even congenial. It is curious that where the poorer class of Arab has come
into close contact with the American or Englishman he has imitated,
in a bizarre and comic fashion, the Western style of dress, but he
has stopped short at the more important aspects of our civilization.
Perhaps, in his present state of culture, the Arab has an ingrained
scorn of sanitation and health. By disposition, and owing to the [461]
intense heat of the summer months, he is a lazy individual, judged
by our standards, working only when he must or when the fancy
takes him. But there are deeper reasons for the Arab's tolerance of
dirt and disease. To say that his attitude is inborn, as some visitors
to the Middle East are prone to do, is begging the question.

The Arab has some admirable virtues, not the least of which is 574
his strong sense of hospitality and charity. The poor man seldom 181
goes away empty-handed, and the visitor is always sure of a meal, 577
a resting-place for the night, and coffee. If not always strictly
truthful, the Arab is unfailingly polite and his courteous manners
would often put a European to shame. He has outstanding courage,
particularly in battle, and despises meanness and immorality. He
is frugal, kindly unless his fierce pride and spirit of independence are
upset, and intensely religious. Indeed, what impressed me most 771
about the Arabs of all classes was their extreme devotion to the 181
faith of the Prophet, and their realistic interpretation of the Koran,
which means more to them in their daily lives than the Bible means

771 to the majority of professing Christians. If an easy acceptance of
181 poor and insanitary living conditions is one of the major faults of
this race, as I believe it is, then such a shortcoming is easily counterbalanced
by their innumerable virtues, which are seldom found in
practice amongst Englishmen.

000 I have not had the opportunity to make a deep study of social
problems in Arabia, but from my interpretation of what I have
seen, I should not hesitate to lay the blame for the vices and backwardness
of Arab life on the system of government which obtains
in most regions. In principle it is comparable with the feudal
361 system in Europe. Apart from the Bedouin country, where life
is migratory and the tribes are tent-dwellers, the majority of Arabs
are concentrated in the fertile valleys, where they can obtain water
622 for their livestock and crops. In Oman, as in other parts of the
continent, the coastal areas are ruled by paramount sheikhs, whose
power is absolute and who are sometimes elected by their subjects,
but who are more generally appointed by succession, the kingdom
thus remaining in the hands of one family. Although many of
these princely families are quite ancient, and have provided rulers
for different sheikhdoms for centuries, it is not unusual to find one
sheikh deposing another by force. Jealousy and a greed for more
territory and power are frequently the root cause of tribal wars.

There is little that is democratic in the government of a sheikhdom.
692 Through his judges and ministers, who are paid out of the
royal purse, the sheikh administers justice. Often it is the justice
of a tyrant, although some sheikhs are just and kindly and are
regarded by their subjects more as 'fathers of the people' than as
651 kings. All land belongs to the sheikh, who is theoretically
471 custodian for his tribe, and he exacts revenues from merchants,
shopkeepers, fishermen, pearling-fleet owners and merchants,
camel breeders and farmers, in the form of a commission on all
business, in addition to heavy taxes on the inhabitants of the towns
and villages. There are, too, taxes on land and property, on fishing
and pearling rights, and profits are even obtained from the sale
[567] (illegal and contrary to the treaties with the British Government,
but still indulged in) of slave labour.

651 Apart from the pearling industry, one of the richest sources of
income in Arabia is from the date plantations, and these, if not
actually owned by the sheikhs, at least provide him with a handsome
additional income. In recent years the Arab rulers have been considerably
enriched by large sums paid for concessions by the oil

companies; this is quite distinct from the actual royalties received 651 from oil-producing wells, which, in several cases, have made millionaires of the sheikhs. In the Trucial Oman Coast, the independent sheikhs are not only paid landing fees for each aircraft, but receive a substantial rental for the use of their lands as aerodromes and flying-boat alighting sites, including emergency landing places which are seldom, if ever, used. There is, in addition, a large amount of native labour employed by the British Government in the vicinity of camps and airfields, which gives an additional source of income to the sheikhs.

It is to be regretted that out of his large income the average 661 sheikh contributes very little indeed to the welfare and enlighten- 511 ment of his people. There are no schools to speak of, except in the larger sheikhdoms, such as Bahrein; roads are an unheard-of luxury; there is no system of sanitation, drainage, or water supply; graft and chicanery amongst the sheikh's ministers are rife, so that large profits are made by the ruling families and merchants out of the silver rupee exchange and, by a cunning system of cornering the markets in wheat and other essential produce, the people are frequently kept short of food or obliged to buy at exhorbitant prices. In other words, it suits the convenience and the pockets of the sheikhs to retain an ignorant and illiterate peasantry, living in conditions of extreme poverty and intolerable squalor.

Unfortunately the British Government, through its system of 648 treaty-relations with the sheikhs, unwittingly fosters this undemocratic form of rule. Under the treaties, which give the British Government certain territorial and coastal rights and privileges, and protect the Arab chieftains against attack from a foreign power (though not, it is to be noted, against tribal wars), the rulers are encouraged to maintain a traditional form of government, and are advised by a British Resident, usually an Arab civil servant, and a Political Officer. The latter, who is appointed by the Indian Government, is usually an ex-officer of an Indian regiment. His principal duty is to ensure that the conditions of the treaties are observed, and to advise the sheikh on matters of state, so that friction does not arise between the throne and its subjects.

Politically and strategically, the Trucial coast is of extreme importance to the British Empire, and in maintaining a benevolent suzerainty over this territory we must, at the same time, keep within the bounds of international law. Thus, while we exercise no colonial or territorial rights over Oman, which is, legally speaking, 648 not a dependency, and over which we hold no mandate, British interests are such that any display of truculence on the part of the rulers would be put down very peremptorily. On the other hand, the existence of an Arab League and the effectively close unity among Moslem peoples throughout the world, must incline British authority to tread warily. Any form of pressure which could be construed by Cairo propagandists as persecution, might easily lead to disturbances in the Arab world beyond Arabia, with unforeseen results.

648 511 The problem is a difficult one. Any reforms of communal life, such as the provision of schools, courts of law based on Western procedure, good roads, efficient water supply and sanitation, the provision of hospitals and pre-natal centres, municipal medical services, and a proper supervision over food supplies and control of prices, all of which are long-standing necessities, should be undertaken by the paramount rulers, the sheikhs, but they, for obvious reasons, are not anxious to diminish their personal incomes by such 'extravagances'.

The British Government, whose treaty 'rights' in Arabia are in reality confined to safeguarding the coasts from foreign aggression, and preventing acts of piracy, has only the rights of a tenant in the inland regions. It is true that active slavery is contrary to the agreement reached between the sheikhs and the British Government, and that for the perpetration of this or certain other 'international' crimes the British Government could exert pressure on the sheikhs, but it is doubtful whether, in these times of political freedom, we could persuade them to rebuild their towns and undertake similar expensive measures to create a healthy social order. On the other hand, the British Government benefits considerably from its commercial and military interests in the Trucial Oman Coast, and has a certain moral responsibility for the peoples inhabiting its zones of influence.

It would thus be quite possible to grant a British loan to the sheikhs for the express purpose of building up such essential public works as hospitals, schools, roads and efficient sanitation schemes, and to set up an organization to ensure that these schemes were properly [186] carried out. The majority of the rulers would have no objection to foreign money being utilized for the improvement of their townships, provided the suspicion could be overcome that foreign influence and interference in internal affairs would not thereby be increased, and their own power and authority diminished. Any supervision of such schemes should preferably be undertaken by an adviser who was familiar with Arab mentality and possessed of a diplomatic 'flair', and the most suitable recruits could be found in the ranks of those imperturbable and tactful officials, the Political Officers.

Arabia, and the Oman Coast in particular, are of immense value to the British Commonwealth, for, apart from their importance to the R.A.F. and the Royal Navy, as strategic bases guarding the land and sea routes to India, the Far East and Africa, they are a potential source of vast petroleum supplies. In return for these benefits, it is incumbent on the British Government and the Government of India (which has political control of the coast from Bahrein to Salalah), to grant financial and economic assistance to the Arabs, who are virtually under British protection already, thereby enabling them to attain a standard of living comparable with that enjoyed by the peoples of territories which are officially under a mandate.

There is no doubt that if such a course were to be followed, amplified by assistance and expert advice in the agricultural and fishery industries, the Arabs would respond by giving us their trust and friendship, qualities which are unhappily deficient in Anglo-Arab relations at the present time. Arab agriculture in particular is in a woefully primitive state in the lower Persian Gulf, and the establishment of colleges, or advice centres, and expert assistance from India and the provision of modern implements, drainage and irrigation on up-to-date lines, would immeasurably help to increase the welfare of the native agriculturist.

## CHAPTER II

1000 WITHIN two weeks I was Mudeer, or 'Master' of the Fort, my predecessor, Bob Allison, having handed over to the satisfaction of us both and of the Regional Director. I had reason to remember the day before his departure. There were two parties; one at the Fort, given to R.A.F. and American friends, and the other at the sheikh's palace. We attended the latter first, assembling at the Political Officer's residence early in the evening for a drink and a 7 smoke, comforts which we should have to forgo whilst under the sheikh's roof.

Captain Bird occupied a low-built, Moorish type of building on the shore of Sharjah creek. It had a pleasant trellised veranda running the full length of the house, and in the hot weather it was a great relief to sit there and enjoy the sea breezes. The only disadvantage was that one got the smells as well, the town being a short distance from the house. An enclosed courtyard, guarded by an immense door of decorated sandalwood, before which sat an Arab sentry, divided the residence into two parts; on the left was the residential and domestic quarter, whilst on the right were the Government offices.

Bird once told me that this arrangement, although extremely convenient at times, had the disadvantage of putting him at the mercy of clerks and official callers who pestered him long after the defined hours. Not that he was the type of man who sought to avoid work; but he was studying hard to acquire a mastery of the Arab language and script, and sacrificed most of his leisure to that end. With his only illuminant an Aladdin lamp, and the small, fanless room buzzing with flies and mosquitoes, he must have possessed exceptional patience to sit there, night after night, translating the caligraphic mysteries of the Koran. Occasionally he would drive over to the Fort in an old Chrysler to take dinner with us, but these visits, unfortunately for us, were all too rare.

676 It is considered bad manners to call on a Mohammedan between 782 five and seven o'clock in the evening, because during this time, 'at the hour of sunset', as it is called, the faithful are called to prayer.

Occasionally we would hear the shrill voice of the *Muezzin* as he 782 chanted from the mosque tower, and those who were caught napping in the streets or desert would fall on their knees straight away and prostrate themselves to the ground. The Arab method of prayer is both complicated and physically uncomfortable. The incantation is said standing, but after each prayer the worshipper, always facing the east, will fall on his knees, touching the ground several times with his forehead. The guards in the Fort had the habit of performing their religious rites and exercises in front of my office door and, as I did not like to disturb them at such times, the practice proved a trifle inconvenient.

At seven-thirty Bird drove Allison and myself to the sheikh's 622 palace, which was a rather unimposing residence about a quarter of a mile away. The real palace, or fort, from which the royal flag fluttered from a ruined tower, was only a few yards away, but it was seldom used as a residence. Originally built by the Portuguese when they invaded the Persian Gulf in the seventeenth century, it had been renovated and partially rebuilt in desert style by successive sheikhs, but the present ruler believed in retrenchment rather than expenditure. He had no intention of spending his money on the upkeep of so pretentious a relic, which was imposing in a ruinous way from the outside, but within shabby and dilapidated in the extreme. In cool weather he would sit with his entourage on a bench outside the great gateway, but the interior was used only by his sons as a kind of gigantic playroom, or by some of his retinue for indulging in shady deals or illegal hashish smoking.

The main residence, to which we were now driving, was a [342 two-storeyed house with a fretted balcony, Moorish windows and a heavily studded door of plain tulip wood. A high mud wall rose up to the windows on one side, and behind this lay the harem. We were met on the steps by the sheikh, Sultan bin Saqr, his three sons, and about a dozen bearded gentlemen with gilded swords and rifles. They formed the sheikh's retinue, and were secretaries, ministers, advisers of some sort and, generally speaking, 'hangers-on', it being a custom of that country for members of the court to attach themselves to the ruler and live at his expense. The cost of maintaining such an entourage and household was about a thousand rupees a day, I was informed; that is, in English money at the present rate of exchange, about £25. Needless to say, the greater part of this sum was derived from taxes and rents.

Sultan bin Saqr wore a perfumed robe of embroidered linen, 622
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622 with a triple aggal of gold thread above his flowered silk head-dress,
291 or kufieyh. His sandals were likewise embroidered with gold
thread, and he wore his ceremonial gold sword and curved *hangar*.
His three sons, aged six, ten and twelve, were similarly dressed,
whilst the nobles, although garbed more simply, managed to
create an air of affluence. One marked difference was that
the sheikh's beard was luxuriously oiled, combed and scented,
whereas the beards of his courtiers were ragged, unkempt and
rather dirty.

622 Closely guarded by a ruffianly gang of armed thugs, the sheikh,
342 after embracing us, took us into the inner courtyard. This was a
plain, unfurnished room with a floor of black and white marble
squares, where the sheikh, his sons, and the Khan Bahadur, an old
[516] friend of ours, whose name was Abdur bin Razzak, removed their
sandals prior to entering the throne room. As Europeans entering
an Arab house do not remove their shoes, it being considered beneath
their dignity to do so (although in reality the practice has a religious
basis and would, therefore, have no meaning for an infidel), we
followed the royal party after divesting ourselves of our hats.
These, together with our torches, we were advised by Abdur bin
Razzak to keep in our possession, otherwise they might be difficult
to recover afterwards!

[353] The throne room was a long, bare apartment with undecorated,
distempered walls broken only by a frieze of the inevitable Moorish
pattern. The floor was covered with exquisite Persian rugs, and
at the end of the room were half a dozen chairs of Victorian Gothic
design covered with purple cushions. It takes a long time to sit
516 down in an Arab house. It is customary for the host to make the
pretence of motioning the guest to a chair; the guest is expected to
refuse the invitation and, in turn, to motion the host to his own
chair. When there are several guests, this absurd ritual of gesticulation
can continue for several minutes. Eventually the sheikh
settled himself in the largest chair, or throne, and we arranged ourselves
in order of precedence on either side of him. Since Captain
000 Bird was the only one who spoke Arabic at all fluently, and Abdur
bin Razzak the only Arab present who spoke any English, conversation
with the sheikh and his sons had to be conducted through
these two intermediaries. I have often suspected later that the
eldest son, Abdul, had quite a useful command of English, but he
never showed the slightest sign of understanding a word that we
said. When I got to know him better, however, and found out

what a cunning little monkey he was, I was more circumspect in 000
the remarks I let drop to my friends in the sheikh's presence.

During a formal visit of this kind the conversation inevitably 576
begins with remarks about the weather, the state of one's health and other commonplaces, and by degrees veers to more practical subjects until, eventually, the subject one really wishes to discuss is delicately touched upon. Certain matters, such as references to women and religion, should never be mentioned, unless one is really exceptionally intimate with one's host. Unsuspecting visitors to Arabia frequently cause offence in this manner. It is also considered bad manners to ask too many questions, even on matters in which one may naturally be very interested, such as Arab customs and tradition.

Experience is the only guide in such things, and one learns in time the correct way of phrasing a sentence to which the required answer will be courteously given, without being too gauche or direct. I am afraid that Allison and I broke the rules rather badly 000
on this occasion, for we rained innumerable questions upon the sheikh through our able interpreter, Abdur bin Razzak. Yet I often wondered afterwards whether this very able diplomat did not discreetly change the questions into honeyed words of flattery, for the sheikh seemed as pleased with our catechism as we were with his replies! Among the subjects discussed were locusts, Persian rugs, wheat supplies, the price of goods from India, the numbers of aircraft we were expecting that week and in the future, and the prospects of the date crop.

Throughout this conversational session (a customary preamble to a meal), we were aware of being closely scrutinized by the other guests, who, together with the ruffianly guards, stood impatiently 622
in the courtyard awaiting the signal to go in to dinner. We were [291]
presently joined by a young Arab of dark, almost negroid complexion and features, with an elaborate scarlet turban, which reminded us of the robber king's head-dress in *Chu Chin Chow*. After making a low obeisance to the sheikh, he permitted himself to be kissed on both cheeks before retiring to a chair. This young man, I was afterwards told, was the heir to the Kalba sheikhdom, but, being under age, the affairs of his land were managed by the Regent, a relative of the sheikh's.

A story of typical Arab intrigue surrounded this young prince. His father, the sheikh of Kalba, had been murdered by a rival sheikh who had his eye on the fertile valleys and date plantations of

622 Kalba. There was a lengthy dispute as to who should succeed to the sheikhdom, with the appearance of a wicked uncle who tried on several occasions to do away with his young nephew, who would legally succeed his father. The sheikh of Ras-al-Khaimah tried by various means to acquire the sheikhdom, but eventually the British Government stepped in and appointed the Sheikh of Sharjah's nephew as Regent. This wily Arab was not at all anxious for young Ali to ascend the throne when he came of age, and various devices had to be thought of to keep Ali out of harm's way.

At one time the British Resident in Bushire had the idea of sending him to the Princes' School in Persia, an academy run on English public school lines, to which the sons of the Indian princes were sent. It was considered that not only would such a step be prudent from a political point of view, but that it was advisable for the future ruler to have a sound education. Young Ali, however, would have none of this, and he ran away after the first term. At the time of our visit, he was under the protection of our host, the Sheikh of Sharjah. Handsome in a negro fashion, he was a sulky-looking youth and, I was confidentially informed, was already a past-master in the traditional desert intrigues.

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Although the sheikhs of Oman are exceedingly proud of their descent, which in some cases extends to the sixteenth century and derives from some Saiyed, or descendant of the Prophet, there is a fair amount of intermarriage with the more beautiful of their slaves. Thus, even in the aristocratic Qasimi family, a powerful tribe which once ruled the greater part of Oman—and to which Sultan bin Saqr belongs—there are traces of negro blood. Oddly enough, the Arabs are not in the least ashamed of such admixtures. They believe that it gives them virility and strength, and there may be something to be said for the theory.

264 A lull had fallen upon the conversation, when one of the sheikh's sons approached his father and began to whisper in his ear. I imagine it had something to do with the preparation of the meal, for the sheikh rose from his chair and beckoned us to follow him to a long, narrow room on the other side of the courtyard. We passed through a fretted doorway and found ourselves in the salle à manger. The floor was liberally strewn with rugs and, on a damask cloth in the middle, there reposed about ten main and five secondary dishes of rice, curry, chipatties, dried fruits and vegetables. The principal dish, in front of which the sheikh seated himself,

consisted of an enormous pile of boiled rice on the top of which lay a greasy carcase of mutton, liberally besprinkled with oil and grated almonds. 264

At a signal from Sultan bin Saqr, the other nobles seated themselves around the floor on their haunches. A negro slave approached with a silver bowl, a tablet of soap and a ewer of warm water. We held our hands in the bowl, lathered them with soap and, when the slave had poured water over them, dried them with a small towel which he provided. Sheikh Sultan then tore a choice piece of mutton into pieces with his bare hands and placed morsels of it on our plates, an action which in Arabia is considered an honour and distinction.

The mutton was exceptionally greasy and fat and I had some difficulty in swallowing it. It tasted much more appetizing when dipped in a bowl of curry, or eaten with chipatti or one of the spiced dishes. The rice, although somewhat oily, was the best part of the meal, as it was richly sprinkled with almonds and raisins. There were numerous other side dishes, such as *fugar*, a kind of truffle, mushrooms in sauce, little puff-balls of batter filled with cream, figs and dates in sweet syrup, pink iced biscuits and cheese made with goats' milk. Since it was polite to make a hearty meal, we were obliged by courtesy to sample most of the dishes and to consume all the morsels which the sheikh kept putting on our plates. All around us the nobles were belching loudly and smacking their lips with gusto, and we were expected to do the same.

I could not restrain a smile when my mind suddenly slipped back to the memory of a very sedate dinner party I had attended in London a month previously. Yet, for all their noise and somewhat barbaric outward satisfaction, their manners were in their own fashion perfect; they held the food with their fingers with extreme delicacy, and were most expert in the art of rolling meat and rice into an oval wedge so that it slipped into the mouth with ease. They, in their turn, must have been amused at our clumsy efforts to emulate Arab manners, and I am sure that I dropped more rice on the precious Bokhara rug than went into my mouth.

At length the sheikh, with a final belch, rose to his feet, signifying that the meal was ended. Thoroughly gorged, we followed suit, and allowed the slave to wash the grease from our hands. Returning to the throne room, we were handed tiny gilt cups into which a slave poured black mocha coffee flavoured with cloves

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264 576 272 It is considered good manners to drink coffee noisily, indicating satisfaction, for coffee-drinking is a rite with the Arabs. Not less than three cups should be taken, after which one shakes the cup to signify that one requires no more; if this pantomime is not undergone, the slave will keep on filling up the cup until the pot is empty. Usually the arrival of the coffee pot is accepted as a sign that the visitor should shortly take his leave, but on this occasion it appeared that Sultan bin Saqr desired our company a little longer. The slave reappeared with a silver censer, which he proceeded to swing under our noses; the smoke of the burning frankincense filled our nostrils with its sweet fragrance and was most pleasant.

000 When eventually we took our departure, shaking hands with all the nobles in turn, the whole party trouped off to the gateway to see us into our car. The sheikh muttered a blessing: '*s'Alla maleikum*', or 'Allah protect you', and we sped off into the night, feeling about as bloated as city Aldermen after a Lord Mayor's banquet. A short drive across the desert brought us to the Fort, where we found our guests awaiting us, and had to face the formidable prospect of another dinner. However, as it was an eventful occasion, we managed to face up to it and do justice to the admirable meal which Lambert and his cooks had produced. For once there was plenty to drink, bottles appearing like magic from beneath the table. The party was a very merry one, with a great deal of singing (particularly from the jovial Irish officer, Captain Pat. Tandy, who was to replace Bird as Political Officer), and a great many speeches, including a humorous one from Bob Allison, my predecessor.

After Allison's departure for Karachi, affairs on the station continued to run smoothly, except for the torrential rains which flooded the desert and held up our aircraft. It was almost a joke to me to visit Flying Control each morning and inquire when the runways would be fit to use. I could see for myself that only a flying-boat could have landed on them in their present state, but officially I had to obtain a verdict from the R.A.F. authorities and signal a statement to the stations *en route*. At length this got so monotonous that I despatched a message to the effect that the runways would not be serviceable for at least two weeks. Two days later a message came from Karachi: 'Can York land at Sharjah to-morrow?' When one realizes that, apart from the impossible condition of the airfield, a York aircraft requires a run of at least

2,000 yards, whereas our longest runway was only 1,500 yards, the 00 D trying nature of my job becomes apparent.

One morning, whilst endeavouring to raise the back wheels of our vehicle out of the mud, assisted by a team of willing Arabs who had suddenly appeared out of the flooded desert, I fell into conversation with an old fisherman. 'There will be no more rain 821 after to-morrow,' he said, looking up at the cloudy sky. 'It will be fine for several weeks.'

Since I had been informed by the Indian Meteorological Office only two hours before that there were no signs of any immediate break in the weather, I wanted to know where he acquired this information.

'The birds have come to the lake,' he answered. 'Also I found a locust in the sand just now.'

I had noticed that, on a small lake formed by the heavy rains, a large flock of seagulls had settled, but attached no importance to this. However, I smiled at the old man and thanked him for his information, believing that he was just babbling in his old age. Two days later the rain ceased and we had a dry period of blue skies and sunshine of six weeks' duration. Not that this proves anything, only I now consider it unwise to dismiss all Arab lore with a laugh.

Our Dakota aircraft now came in with regularity, and it was a D0D pleasant change to meet people who had just arrived from England, or who were returning home from the Far East for the first time since 1941. They stayed for about half an hour, taking coffee and biscuits in the mess whilst the aircraft refuelled; sometimes the delay was longer, especially if a complicated load had to be changed, or some minor deficiency of the engine had to be remedied. After each landing, the station engineer had to make an overhaul and check the refuelling operation, and it was largely due to this fact that not one accident occurred during the whole of my experience on the route. True, the Ensign is a very fine aircraft and its Whitney-Pratt engines are among the best in the world, but the fine record of safe flying which our airlines enjoyed was also due to expert and efficient maintenance at the bases and at stopping points *en route*. The Ensign has been criticized because it is old and slow; it was first put into service in 1938, and has had a new type of engine since then. But it is extremely safe and comfortable, and I do not think anyone objects to travelling at 130 miles an hour under those conditions.

It was my custom during the visits of aircraft, after I had [illegible]

OOV the passengers and conducted them to the mess, to take the commander to my private room and discuss the trip with him over a cup of coffee. Most of them were glad to get away from the crew and passengers for half an hour, and it enabled me to get to know them personally. They were all fine pilots, and some had flown on the route for more than ten years and knew every fold in the mountains and every rock along the vast coastline of Persia and Baluchistan. This may seem a gross exaggeration, but when you have been flying over one route for several years it is extraordinary how you look out for, and identify, familiar objects, however small.

Two of the pilots whom I got to know very well were Captains Griffiths and Trevor Hoyle. The latter, who at one time was on the London stage, came of a Kentish family and we had many acquaintances in common. He was a very fine cricketer, an amusing raconteur, and one could easily imagine him playing the libertine in a sophisticated comedy, or the name part in *Raffles*. They all seemed to be amused at the idea of my prolonged stay in Sharjah. For half an hour's stay Sharjah was quite a delightful place, but they could never understand anyone actually enjoying the desert as a permanent place of residence.

At that time we had two days a week during which no aircraft visited the station, and we were thus able to relax and make occasional visits into the interior. For the first month or so I contented myself with trips to the beach at Hera, a small dependency of Sharjah. It was a romantic spot, with soft white sands extending for more than two miles, and screened from the desert by a grove of coco-nut palms. The sea here was always a deep, ultramarine colour, with powerful breakers on which we used to surf-ride. It was fairly shallow and for that reason we were seldom troubled by sharks, although they swarmed a short distance out in the Gulf and from the air could be seen in shoals. From the safety of an aircraft cabin it was fascinating to watch them leaping out of the water, like salmon in a weir, and disappear into the pellucid green currents.

After a swim, we used to lie on the sands and get thoroughly tanned in the brilliant sunshine, for in March the sun was not hot enough to be dangerous. My body soon resembled that of an Arab in colour and there is little doubt that, had I ventured forth in desert dress, I could easily have masqueraded as one. Only two Englishmen in Oman, to my knowledge, wore Arab clothes as a regular habit: Captain Joyce, the head of the anti-locust commission, OOO and Lermitte, the representative of the Petroleum Concession Co., who found the long *kufieyh* and the *abbas* not only comfortable for travelling, but also politically expedient when going far into the interior.

The beach at Hera was literally coloured with some of the most exquisite sea-shells I have ever seen. There were shells of delicate coral pink, purple, mother o' pearl, browns and greys and bright scarlet, some wrought in the most fantastic and fairy-like shapes imaginable. Even the common molluscs had a beauty one never sees in the European species, some being striped with browns and reds. The commonest of all were the cowries, which varied in size from a pea to an egg, all exquisitely and delicately coloured. In a short time I collected hundreds of the best specimens, some of which I brought back to England, to the delight of my friends, who are using them as novel ash-trays. Any museum which specialized in conchology would find a mine of treasure along the shores of the Persian Gulf, and the collector would find it well worth his while to make a visit to Oman. One American officer, whose unit was stationed at Sharjah, took back some large ray-mollusc shells which he had collected at Sharjah and sold them in New York to a museum for $25 each.

# CHAPTER III

000 CONSIDERING the climate and the conditions, we worked extremely hard at Sharjah, for the desert is not often conducive to continuous and concentrated desk work, and being cooped up in an office all day was not always desirable. But for these occasional excursions to the beach, with a longer trip into the interior now and then, life would have been unbearably monotonous.

One of my duties as Station Manager was to visit the emergency alighting area at Ras-al-Khaimah every two months, to inspect the mooring buoys and ensure that they had been kept in good condition; I also had to check the stocks of petrol, which were kept on barges in the creek, to make certain that no leakages, accidental or intentional, had occurred, and to arrange for periodical replacements.

491 Owing to the bad state of the 'roads' beyond Sharjah, which heavy rains had rendered impassable to wheeled traffic, it was not possible for us to visit Ras-al-Khaimah until 24th February, 1945. One uses the word 'road' here in a general sense, since there are no metalled or rolled highways in the whole breadth and length of Oman, least of all in the direction of Ras-al-Khaimah. Between Sharjah and Dubai a track has been created by cars and trucks, which bears some resemblance to a motor road, and its surface, at any rate in dry weather, is hard and smooth. Everywhere else the only highways are camel and donkey tracks, emphasized here and there by tyre marks in the sand. In places where the sand is still wet and boggy, one sees pits where vehicles have sunk in the mud up to their axles. Yet, of all the roads in Oman, I have never seen one like that which runs, curves and dips between Sharjah and Ras-al-Khaimah. Even to an experienced dirt-track rider it would seem a nightmare, and no one who respected his motor-car would dream of negotiating it except in emergency. However, our visit was imperative and could not be put off either on account of bumps and sandhills or the woeful lack of suitable transport.

The distance is, roughly, seventy miles, but a journey three times as long would not cause half as much damage to the springs of a car, or use so much petrol (ten gallons each way). A comparable trip would be to take a car straight across Dartmoor, 491 ignoring all roads and tracks, and going ahead through bracken, fells and over the tors. Such a journey could not possibly harm a car more than this trip to Ras-al-Khaimah. In the few roads shown on a large-scale military map of Oman, that to Ras-al-Khaimah is not indicated, although a few inter-related camel tracks are shown. Yet, in ways other than those connected with motoring, it is one of the most interesting journeys I have made in that part of Arabia.

Two vehicles were requisitioned for the journey; a 15-cwt., 000 four-wheeled drive, Western Desert battle-wagon, belonging to the R.A.F. (and known for some inexplicable reason as a 'fish and chip' wagon by the troops), and a Ford V-8 brake or station wagon. Neither was in an exemplary state, the ignition system of the truck being notoriously erratic, while the station wagon, which belonged to the Fort, had just returned from the workshops after a major overhaul. Both were still convalescent and uncertain on their wheels, but they were the only transport we could procure. All our supplies had to come by sea, new vehicles were impossible to obtain, whilst spares were very grudgingly released by Headquarters after a lengthy exchange of vituperous correspondence.

The party consisted of eight: S/Ldr. Percy Cranley, the Officer Commanding the R.A.F. Unit; myself; the Medical Officer (F/Lt. Cargill); the Station Engineer (Sparkes); the Station Coxswain (Jock Frew); the Radio Officer (Stanton); the Junior Coxswain (Canteenwallah); the Khan Sahib Hussein, Agent for the Anglo-Iranian Oil Company; and Suleman Beg, our driver.

After an early breakfast, we set off at seven o'clock, with the station wagon leading. We picked up the Khan Sahib at his residence in Sharjah and set off in a north-easterly direction left of the Sheikh's Wells, where we met the other vehicle. For the first ten miles the journey was uninteresting, consisting of a soft sand-track in which our wheels slithered continuously, making steering very difficult. There was no vegetation to speak of, apart from the 137 ever-present scrub and desert stonecrop, with occasional clumps of 389 *ashgar*, a poisonous plant with broad, greyish leaves, from which the Arabs make an inferior gunpowder, since it contains saltpetre. A speed greater than twelve miles an hour was not possible at this 000 stage of the journey, but shortly after eight o'clock we left the sand-hills and entered a tract of hard, smooth desert which spread, flat and interminable, for twenty miles or so.

000 The cars were running fairly well, but the glare from the sun was very trying to the eyes, in spite of tinted glasses. The roofs of the cars became so hot that the paint on the surface bubbled, and inside it was suffocating. We made a halt after about thirty miles' hard driving, had a smoke, and a drink from our tea flasks. To the north of us there shimmered what appeared to be a vast lake. I started to walk towards it and it gradually receded, turning out to be, as I had suspected, a perfect mirage, with waves and even a thin line of breakers on the shore. When I reached the spot where the 'lake' had been, I noticed, on looking down at the ground, that it sparkled as if covered with minute crystals. The surface was whiter than that of the surrounding desert, and I found that it consisted of a thin layer or crust of salt, intermingled with silica. A slice about six inches in diameter, and an eighth of an inch thick, was easily levered off and inspected by the company. I had literally succeeded in taking a piece of mirage in my hands. In case the scientifically-minded should quibble over this theory, I hasten to add that, although these saline-silica crystals undoubtedly caused this particular mirage, I should hesitate to ascribe all mirages as being due to the same cause. Others may possibly be due to high-frequency radiation of solar light waves striking the earth and being reflected back, and viewed from a favourable angle by the spectator.

133 The sand-plain* which we were now traversing, which was composed of sun-baked mud, showed signs of having been flooded at high-tide; it soon gave way to soft sandhills, and we rocked and swayed along for several miles until at last we reached the shore. Fortunately the tide was far out and, by creeping under the low cliffs, we contrived to keep our wheels out of the soft mud. A sandbank rose out of the cobalt sea until it formed a gleaming, [361] white spit of land, forming a narrow creek, on the far side of which stood out mistily the little town of Umm-al-Quain. The circular watch-towers, plaster houses and white-walled palace of the sheikh looked fairy-like in the morning sunlight. A white-sailed dhow swept gracefully down the creek and the fronds of the date palms swayed in the light breeze.

137 Before us the road swept suddenly into a sharp gradient and we entered the long, green valley of Hadaithah. Here, in startling contrast to the arid desert we had left behind us, the vegetation was lush and plentiful. Spring had come early to the valley and even the insipid neam trees (a species of acacia) had a verdant, pristine

*[Between Sharjah and Ras-al-Khaimah--Analyst]

beauty in their wiry branches and finely serrated leaves. In their shade the grasses grew tall and vivid, while around were masses of small yellow flowers which resembled the wild marguerite. 137

We had gone only a few miles when the station wagon broke down, necessitating a stop for repairs. While the engineer poked his head under the bonnet, I took a stroll in the valley and climbed the high sandbanks in order to observe the vegetation more closely. To my surprise, I found several varieties of flowers common to the English countryside growing in profusion in this wilderness. According to the notes I made at the time there were white campions, vetch, broom (the flowers were smaller than ours and lacking in perfume), sorrel, dandelion, convolvulus, a small yellow flower which resembled 'Old Lady's Slipper', and camel-grass; the last-named having a segmented stalk and spear-like leaves not unlike bamboo, of which it may be a distant relative. This grass grew to a height of nearly four feet.

There were also clumps of *ashgar*, the rubbery-leaved bush which exudes a highly-poisonous sap, and whose dark purple flowers have a passionate, poppy-like beauty. The sandy ground 136 was full of burrows made by rock lizards, rabbits and desert rats, though I saw none of these animals on this stage of the journey. Locusts and grasshoppers were plentiful, and I saw several Red Admiral, Tortoiseshell and Comma butterflies, also a large black ant marked with white spots, with elongated legs which raised its body an eighth of an inch above the ground.

The engine repaired, we drove on for another twenty miles, 133 until the granite ridges of Ruus-al-Jibal came into sight. This range of hills, which stretches from the northernmost tip of the peninsula to as far south as Muscat, varies in height from 2,000 to 8,000 feet. Commanders of aircraft using this route have assured me, however, that the latter figure is an error, and that the maps are incorrectly marked. The mountains looked blue in the distance, as all mountains do, but as we approached them the dark patches became honey-coloured cliffs, and the light sweeps turned into ridges and plateaux of variegated strata. As mountains go, they are not beautiful in the æsthetic Alpine sense, yet there is a certain grandeur about their irregular peaks and the ragged angles of the cliffs. The violet and pink slopes were most soothing to our desert-tired eyes.

In an unexpected dip in the valley we came upon a herd of camels 233 grazing on the tender thorn leaves; there were about six calves

233 amongst them and, at the approach of our cars, they reared in terror and loped awkwardly towards a defensive buttress of rock. One supercilious parent stood his ground, eyeing us with a bilious look in which both reproach and indignation were combined; he thrust out a pendulous lip and roared like a miniature lion. Further on we met the owners of the herd, a group of Bedouin Arabs, who were squatting on the sand, eating dates and chipatties. Mauser rifles, embellished with silver bands, were slung over their shoulders and, although they looked fierce enough to cut our throats at the slightest provocation, they cheerfully answered the '*Subbuk ala'l bukhair*' with which the Khan Sahib greeted them.

We were about twenty miles from our objective, the little seaport of Mahrid (which is separated from the town of Ras-al-Khaimah by a wide creek), when the station wagon again broke down and had to be finally abandoned. The engineer, who informed us that a defective petrol pump was the cause of the trouble, volunteered to remain behind with the driver until we returned with a tow rope. The road became worse as we set forth again, the steering wheel frequently being wrenched out of the coxswain's hands as the truck was flung down sharp escarpments or rolled down soft banks of deep sand. When we reached a small village, unnamed on the map, the habitations of which consisted of rude barousti huts, the track disappeared in a clump of neam trees and we narrowly escaped falling into a newly-dug well.

The villagers clustered around our car and successfully misdirected us on to a road leading in the opposite direction to that which we desired to take. Fortunately a mud wall and a dead camel barred our progress and we stopped the truck, while the Khan Sahib and myself reconnoitred the environs of the village to get our bearings. When one is lost in a patch of desert it is no easy matter to retrieve one's position on the map. We decided that
136 our road lay to the left, and returned to the car and the dead camel,
825 over which hovered, in vicious anticipation, a flock of scrofulous vultures and hawks.

These revolting creatures are venerated by the Arabs, as they are very efficient scavengers and in a few days will pick a carcase clean, so that in a short time one returns to find nothing left but a perfect skeleton or sun-bleached bones scattered over the desert. It is a serious offence to shoot a vulture, which the Arabs call *nasir*. They never attack a living creature, as the eagle will do, but hover above it directly it shows signs of dying. I was told that they will follow a sick donkey for miles, circling lazily in the air and greedily awaiting the moment when the animal will totter to its knees and slowly expire. 136 825

A patriarchal-looking Arab in a brown silk *abbas* came towards us and greeted the Khan Sahib with affection. He told us that he belonged to the retinue of the Sheikh Raschid, who was camping in the hills nearby. Apparently the sheikh was on a hunting expedition and had shot several gazelle and *houbari*, the lesser bustard. We declined his invitation to take coffee with the sheikh, as this would have meant a delay of at least an hour, and time was pressing; so he gave us very exact instructions for finding the road to Mahrid. This meant crossing a wadhi, where the ground was still soggy and uncertain for heavy vehicles, but with luck and good driving we crossed it without mishap. A grubby Arab boy appeared from behind a neam tree and, jumping on our running board, insisted on showing us the way; we did not begrudge him the lift and, as it transpired, he really was helpful. 000

The way[4] meandered through a field of perfumed clover, a small-leaved variety with tiny yellow flowers. The scent was reminiscent of mimosa and was so strong as to be almost overwhelming. Hundreds of bees, attracted by the smell, filled the still air with their murmuring. The Arabs collect large quantities of honey from this district, and it is all made from the scented clover-pollen. The mountains now loomed titanically above us, grim and lowering, and ten miles to the west we could see the spires and towers of Ras-al-Khaimah reflected in the clear blue waters of the creek. [137] [222]

At the foot of the hills the softer green of the grass was shaded by dark avenues of neam trees, plantations of date palms, and the summer gardens of the wealthier residents. We had eight miles to go before we reached Mahrid, and it was already noon. We felt hungry and thirsty, and longed for the cool veranda of the Khan Sahib's house, with prospects of sherbet, *haloua* and cheese. At that moment—such is the perversity of life—our truck gave a convulsive cough and refused to budge further. A quick inspection by our driver revealed that we had run out of petrol. [529] [262]

No course was open to us other than to alight from the over-heated vehicle, light pipes or cigarettes, and sit down to talk the situation over. We had a faint inkling of how the Army at Tobruk and Marble Arch must have felt in a similar predicament, only with Messerschmitts and Junkers zooming overhead, and how they

[4] [Near Mahrid--Analyst]

OOD must have got to loathe those rattling ovens, the desert battle-wagons!

None of us felt like walking the ten miles to Ral-al-Khaimah.
We decided to invite the Khan Sahib to give us his advice. He
at least knew the locality; but to our surprise he had disappeared.
We assumed he had designs of his own, and waited patiently in the
245 shade of an old palm tree until he should return. On our left the
creek flowed lazily as the tide came in, while to our right lay open
312 fields of clover, divided by plantations of thriving date palms,[1] each
about a quarter of an acre in extent, and surrounded by flint-and-
mortar walls three feet high. The trees are carefully tended from
[483] the first planting, and the plantations contain as many as twenty
to thirty deep wells each, from which the water is hand-drawn by
means of buckets attached to long ropes.

On some plantations there is a simple, but effective, irrigation
system; this consists of channels running at right angles, like the
lines on a crossword puzzle. The young plants are placed in the
ground between these channels, and are surrounded by low mud
walls. This enables the water to collect around the roots in a
saucer-shaped depression. The roots penetrate the soil for five or
six feet in their search for water, and trees in their prime (about
twenty years old) reach a height of thirty feet or more. The bark
is composed of the stem-base of the leaves or fronds, which die off
each summer. The fruit begins to form in July and the dates are
[251] ready for picking in September. They are then packed tightly in
boxes and taken by camel or dhow to the merchants for export.
Those intended for local consumption are either dried, or else
pickled in their own syrup, to which is sometimes added wild honey
and ginger, making a delicious concoction.

233 Herds of cattle were grazing in the fields, watched by young
[517] Arab boys; they sang ditties to each other or told stories, a favourite
desert pastime. The cattle are very small and anæmic compared
with European stock, the largest bull being no larger than a young
English heifer. Like the Indian cattle, from which no doubt they
are descended, they are hump-backed and have a pathetic *moo-oo*
which resembles the cry of a nursery toy cow. The Arab farmers
tie the forefeet of their cattle together to prevent them from straying,
and their progress when being driven reminded me of a two-legged race.

000 We had brought a .303 service rifle with us. It had originally
belonged to one of our Askhari guards, but he had not looked after

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[1] [Ten miles from Ras-al-Khaimah -- Analyst]

it, and as a result it had got clogged and fouled. One day he fired 000 it off in a moment of exuberance and the barrel burst about eight inches from the muzzle. I took the damaged weapon to the R.A.F. armourer's shop and got him to saw the top part of the barrel off. Thus shortened, it made an excellent short-range weapon, effective at 200 yards, though it went off with a violent explosion and had a recoil like an elephant gun. In addition to the .303, Sparkes had brought a Webley, and Cranley a Colt automatic. Thus for several minutes we amused ourselves by taking shots at a stake we had fixed in the ground fifty yards away, to the applause and amusement of a group of Arab labourers from the date plantations.

Five camels approached our resting place from the other side of the creek, and through my Zeiss glasses I saw that one of the two riders was the Khan Sahib. As soon as he rode up, he explained that he had hired them from a nearby village and suggested that we should proceed to Mahrid on the backs of these scraggy-looking beasts. I had never ridden a camel before, and was not encouraged by the venemously sly look which the leading she-camel gave me; she had a rich fawn coat, bared in patches around her scrawny haunches by distemper, and she chewed viciously at her bridle with yellow teeth. However, I crawled on to her back, Cranley scrambling up behind me, and the rest of the party followed suit. Suleman Beg was left in charge of the truck. The caravan then started the journey to Mahrid. The owner of the camels, who took the lead, set off at a loping canter which I found most uncomfortable when I tried to emulate him. After a few miles I began to feel rather sick, and was glad when, an hour and a half later, the little seaport of Mahrid hove into sight. When I jumped off my steed I began to scratch violently, for the camel's hair was infested with fleas.

The Khan Sahib sent one of his seamen back to the battle-wagon 342 with tins of petrol, which the men carried on top of their heads, and invited us inside his house. It was a cool plaster building of typical 353 Arab design, with glassless windows protected by iron bars. A large, iron-studded teak gate led into an open courtyard, with stone steps leading up to the main living room on the left wing. This was a barely furnished chamber, with Shiraz rugs on the floor, a solitary Turkish inlaid table, and some wooden benches. We sat down and gratefully imbibed glasses of cool sherbet, enjoying the sea breeze that blew in through the windows. Arab children 609 in the village street peered through the grating at us, begging, as they invariably do, for baksheesh, until the Khan Sahib, uttering a 'roh, zitar', sent them scampering away.

000 '*roh, zitat*', sent them scampering away. Presently a slave brought 262 us dishes of *haloua*, which is made of atta flour, wild honey and ghee butter; dates swimming in honey and ginger syrup, and slices of cheese made from goats' milk.

000 While we regaled ourselves, the coxswain went out in a dhow to inspect the emergency alighting area, to make sure that the mooring buoys were clean and free of barnacles, and to inspect the chains and tackle. In 1932, before the present alighting area at Dubai had been chosen, it was intended to make a flying-boat base at Ras-al-Khaimah, but the sheikh refused to give his consent. He was offered a generous rental for the area, with an additional landing fee for each aircraft, while members of the Indian community, who foresaw great possibilities in the project, promised him that they would develop the town into a second Karachi if he would accept the British offer. Yet the sheikh persisted in his refusal, partly because he was afraid of foreign domination and of losing some of his independence, and partly because the neighbouring sheikhs (notably Sultan bin Saqr, of Sharjah, father of the present ruler) had dissuaded him. If he permitted the British to build a fort and a flying-boat base there, they argued, he would be liable to attack from Bedouin tribesmen. This was in the days when tribal wars were rife, and the roaming Bedouins attacked and plundered at the slightest provocation. Even the Corporation's premises at Sharjah were subjected to attack and siege on one occasion. Thus the establishment of a new British fort at Ras-al-Khaimah would give the Bedouins a fresh incentive for causing trouble.

Ras-al-Khaimah lost the opportunity of becoming an important air base and a flourishing port, for the Indians would have built piers and made a harbour for coastal steamers. The following year negotiations were opened between the Government of India (on behalf of the Corporation) and the sheikhs of Sharjah and Dubai, and agreements were signed which resulted in the present land and sea bases being built. The Khan Sahib informed me that the Sheikh of Ras-al-Khaimah, having regretted his short-sighted policy and feeling that he had been double-crossed by Sharjah and Dubai, was now anxious for the British Government to build a flying-boat and land-plane base on his territory. This is most unlikely to happen, however, since, apart from the remoteness of the site, the shallowness of the water and its unsuitability for both flying-boats and ocean-going craft, it has no road communications fit for motor

transport; there is no flat desert, as at Sharjah, suitable for an air- 000
field, and the mountain ranges are too close for safe flying.

In parenthesis, I learnt that shortly after the Sheikh of Sharjah 622
had agreed to lease his land to the British for the purposes of an 683
airfield, he was secretly murdered by a hired assassin, who crept
into his palace while he slept, put his eyes out with a red-hot iron,
and slit his throat. The present ruler of Sharjah, Sultan bin Saqr,
never sleeps without an armed bodyguard outside his room, and it
is whispered that he is waiting to avenge the murder of his father.
He has little doubt who instigated the crime.

An old retainer of the Khan Sahib's, a wrinkled Arab with a 302
henna-dyed beard, Ali bin Achmed, came to talk to us. He is 517
employed as a seaman and looks after the petrol dhow on which
the emergency stocks provided by the Anglo-Iranian Oil Company
are stored. He is a distinguished-looking old man, with a fund
of stories which he related to us as the sun sank slowly behind the
sandhills and the palm trees leant in ragged silhouette against the
sapphire-tinted horizon.

The Khan Sahib closed the shutters, lighted a perfumed coil of 354
anti-mosquito powder, and hung a kerosene lamp from a hook 264
in the ceiling. A slave brought us dishes of rice, steamed lamb, curry
balls, chipatties, *haloua*, fruit and turkish delight, and, feeling
ravenous, we ate in silence, seated on Persian rugs with our legs
tucked underneath us in Arab style.

After the third cup of clove-scented coffee, we sat in the dim [272]
light, smoking cigarettes, while Ali bin Achmed puffed away at 517
his tiny pipeful of hashish. He told us wild stories of shipwrecks
on the rocks, and of pirates who plundered the unfortunate vessels
and held the passengers to ransom; of British gunboats which
shelled the village in reprisal and clapped the headmen in gaol.
Then he spoke of the wild men of the mountains, the Shi'hou 186
tribe, who seldom left their dark caves in the hills, and who lived on 563
fish, wild honey and dates. They never mixed with the lowland
Arabs, were greatly feared on account of their wild appearance and
cruel habits, and were believed to be in league with a djinn.

'There is gold and tin in the mountains,' said Ali, 'but men will not seek for it on account of these wild ones. A man would be rich who dared to climb those cruel slopes and search for the gleaming metal. But, praise be to Allah, it would be a foolhardy enterprise.'

The Shi'hou tribe is a very ancient one, according to Ali, and

186 inhabited the mountain caves long before the present Arabs, who
563 are mostly farmers and fishermen, came to live in the valleys and date plantations. It is said by some (he added) that they are descendants of Sinbad, the sailor hero of the *Arabian Nights*, who was born at Zubair, near Basra, where the Euphrates joins forces with the Shatt-al-Arab river. In these mountains the fabulous Giant Roc, *rukh* in Arabic, is said to have had a lair from which he would carry gold and precious stones, as well as pearls, to his island fortress near Aden.

'It was probably nothing more than a *na'qr* (eagle),' broke in the Khan Sahib with a chuckle, but Ali would have none of this.

'No, Sahib, it was a giant bird with a spread of wings that shadowed the land for miles and struck fear into the hearts of men,' he said, uttering a '*Bismillah*' to protect himself from evil.

'Tush!' said the Khan Sahib. 'Then it was a *na'sir* (vulture)', and Ali, thus affronted, fell into a sulky silence and puffed away at his pipe, and we did not hear more of his stories that night.

352 The Khan Sahib began to yawn sleepily and presently asked us if
354 we were ready to retire. He conducted us along a white-walled
357 gallery to our sleeping quarters, a low-ceilinged room containing half a dozen charpoys and a brazier of smouldering charcoal. Feeling drowsy, we undressed quickly and were soon half asleep. Outside the veranda a watchman chanted songs of praise to Allah; a pai dog bayed at the moon, and the fronded leaves of the palms whispered secrets to the night.

# CHAPTER IV

WE were awakened shortly after dawn by the roaring of the surf 000 and, after a wash down with ice-cold well water in the courtyard, I strolled through the village to get a glimpse of the mountains. Pink in the first flush of morning light, Jebel Kawa, the highest peak in the range, rose in fluted folds from a turquoise sea. A brisk westerly wind blew across the desert, and the palm fronds nodded violently, like feathers in the bonnets of agitated old ladies. Streaks of butterfly blue glinted between the leaves—the bright underwings of the jays. Behind the low plaster wall of a merchant's summer house the plum trees were sprouting into baby green, and tortoise-shell butterflies hovered lazily in the increasing radiance of sunlight.

On my return to the Khan Sahib's house I found Sparkes smoking a cigarette in the courtyard. Ali had sent a car with a towrope and had brought him back at midnight, but the ropes had broken several times and we were abed before he reached the village. Sparkes showed me a grey lizard he had brought back, a fine specimen measuring four feet from nose to tail, which he gave to one of the servants to cook for their dinner. Breakfast was a simple meal of fruit, coffee and dates rolled in chipatties; being ravenous we did it justice. The Arabs are sparing eaters, and only 261 consume large quantities of food at their ceremonial feasts or when entertaining guests, and we found that when in the desert it was easy to accustom oneself to their habits.

After a pipe and a stroll along the foreshore, we were joined by 291 the Khan Sahib, resplendent in a gold-brocaded turban and brown 142 silk *abbas*, and he suggested that we should make a call on Sheikh Sultan bin Salim, ruler of Ras-al-Khaimah The Khan Sahib, who is a handsome man of sixty-five, six feet tall, broad-shouldered and inclined to stoutness, has the fair skin of the Persian or Bedouin, expressive hands, and the gracious manners of an aristocrat. With his bushy black eyebrows and grey toothbrush moustache, he could easily be mistaken for an Italian nobleman. He belongs to a very ancient Arab family, and his father was British Resident at Sharjah at the beginning of the century.

000 During the journey to Ras-al-Khaimah, which we undertook
in a large sailing dhow, he related some interesting facts about the
725 Mohammedan religion and its *tabus*. The majority of Europeans,
184 he said, often imagined that to the true follower of the Prophet
the dog was anathema, not to be touched or mentioned in conversation. Now it was very true that some of the stricter sects of Islam regarded the dog as unclean, but this view was not generally held by the tribes in Oman, who were fond of their dogs, fed and treated them well, and regarded them as household pets. One should, however, always wash one's hands after touching a desert dog. Knowing our pai dog, we unequivocally agreed with this dictum, for these pariahs are never washed and, though his short brown hair looks clean and in good condition, it is usually crawling with lice and other vermin.

231 The pai is a descendant of the wild dog of the desert, but he has been domesticated for centuries and has all the virtues of the tamed household pet. Although exceedingly timid by disposition, he will bark fiercely at undesirable visitors and makes an excellent watch-dog for that reason, although he rarely attacks and is easily driven off. He is so accustomed to being bullied and stoned by village children, that if one merely bends down and pretends to pick up a stone he will take to his legs with a yelp. He is the laziest creature imaginable and will spend all his days lying in the sun, oblivious of the scores of flies which settle on his eyes and nose, too tired to flick them off. When approached, he will roll over on his back and stick his legs up in the air, as if to say: 'I am defenceless: do with me what you will'.

Pai dogs have very little 'character', are incurably sentimental and lacking in common sense; they have no traffic sense and are constantly run over by cars. Yet in time one grows fond of them. Like most dogs, they are loyal to one master and enjoy nothing so much as to be petted or to lie on a rug and dream. In appearance they resemble the English whippet, but have the head of a terrier, and their run is something of a trot. Their short-haired coats are
of a rich golden brown, running to light fawn on the head and
224 belly. The sheikhs breed a special kind of hunting dog, which is
fast and cunning and is used for gazelle hunting. These animals are
similar to the pai dog, but have sharper faces and long, silky brown
hair. They are probably a cross between the pai dog and the saluki.

000 The sea in the creek was very calm and the gentle breeze scarcely stirred our sails, so that we took nearly twenty minutes to cross the

mile of shallow water. There was a haze over the land, a sure sign 000
of hot weather ahead, and the straggling town of Ras-al-Khaimah 361
had the blurred appearance of a Whistler pastel. The palace, cornered by battlemented towers with an architectural resemblance to a crusader's castle, was built of pink rock, the rose-red hue of Petra. In the sunlight it had the beauty of a coral shell, hemmed in by the cube-shaped houses of the merchants, walled gardens of date palms and pomegranates, and the gleaming gold dome of the mosque.

We disembarked alongside a little wooden pier and began to [504]
trail up the steep, pebbled shore towards the palace. A guard of 622
Beni Yas tribesmen approached with rifles at the ready, until the 342
Khan Sahib gave them a sign and spoke to them in the local dialect. Recognizing him, they bowed respectfully and, after scrutinizing us with a great show of curiosity, ushered us through the tall gateway into the palace courtyard. It was open to the sun, with two tall palm trees growing as high as the verandas, on which lolled Arab retainers in the act of performing their morning toilet. Camels, tied to stakes in the ground, reared up on their knees as we entered and began to snarl in their unpleasant fashion.

Standing in an ornately-decorated doorway was a tall, white-bearded figure, clad in long white robes, with a gold sword belted to his waist. It was Sheikh Sultan bin Salim, ruler of Ras-al-Khaimah. He slowly descended the steps to the courtyard and embraced the Khan Sahib in the Arab style, and then shook hands with each of us in turn. In a few minutes we were joined by the members of the Court, and the procession wended its way into the cool, dim reception chamber at the far end of the palace. The building was in a much better state of repair than the palace at Sharjah, and the floor of the chamber was of black and white marble squares, highly polished by sandals. The chairs, of rosewood inlaid with mother o' pearl, were emblazoned with the sheikh's coat of arms, whilst priceless Shiraz rugs, of wine red and Prussian blue pattern, were scattered on the floor.

Silk cushions were provided for us to sit upon, and after the usual [574]
introductory conversation, a slave brought in a pot of fragrant coffee. A large brass tray was placed by our side; this contained numerous sweetmeats, including Turkish delight, and little bowls
of pomegranates, oranges and almonds. The sheikh questioned us 000
about our journey, and seemed highly amused when we told him of the breakdown of the cars. He soon started off on a long discourse about the advantages of having an airfield at Ras-al-Khaimah,

000 and pointed out that if we were based there we should have no need of motor-cars. The Khan Sahib tactfully hedged him off this subject, since he realized that I had no desire to commit myself to any statement which the sheikh might construe as an official decision.

622 We were on safe ground when we asked him[1] about the date [471] plantations, for the sheikh is one of the largest plantation owners 245 in Oman, and a considerable part of his income is derived from the 439 sale of dates. It appeared that the crop was doing excellently this year, but, owing to the war and the shortage of transport, the demand from foreign countries had dropped considerably. He was, therefore, exporting greater quantities to India and Egypt, although a fair amount was being shipped to South Africa and America. When we told him that people in England had seen very few dates during the war, and that the few which were on [262] sale were rationed, he was very sympathetic. He knew little about English food and, being an Arab, could scarcely imagine how a household could exist without dates.

578 Praise Allah, he said, they had experienced no drought or plague of insects this year, but they had suffered from raids from the hills. The cursed Shi'hou tribesmen (might they die of plague in their filthy caves!) had been attacking and robbing his labourers, so that they were afraid to enter the plantations except in groups, and he had been obliged to employ armed guards to keep them off. That very morning, he explained, he intended to hold a conference of his nobles to plan a campaign of defence against these marauders. He intended to drive them back into their mountains and inflict such heavy punishment that they would not venture into the plains again for many months. If only he had an aeroplane, he said wryly, he would know how to deal with the Shi'hou! 'Like you do in Afghanistan,' he added with a chuckle.

622 The sheikh, who was a fine-looking old man with a patriarchal, weather-beaten face, had a reputation for being one of the most fearless fighters in Oman, and his feud with Sharjah of ten years ago was still talked about in the desert. Hanging on the wall was a long ceremonial sword, with a chased gold handle; it is said that he had swept off the heads of three men with its blade with a single sweep. He had a face of great power, a tight-lipped mouth, a large hooked nose, and keen grey eyes under shaggy eyebrows. Although few of us understood his language, we all fell under the spell of his strong personality. He was kindly and courteous, but

[1] [The Sheikh of Ras-al-Kalmah -- Analyst]

we all were sensible that behind the smiling mask lay a mind as 622
keen and poised as the blade of his ceremonial sword.

When we left the palace, the sun was blazing from a cloudless 000
sky and the creek shone like a mirror. We returned to the Khan Sahib's house to pack some refreshments, and then mounted the six camels which he had procured for us and began the eight-mile ride to his summer residence at the foot of the mountains. Although a comparatively short distance, the journey was a tiring one. Apart from a few scattered palm trees, there was no shade, and the sun, being in the meridian, was at its fiercest and beat down upon us mercilessly. The humidity was extremely trying, also: Frew thought it must have been about 80°. The perspiration streamed off our faces and seeped through our shirts. Our camels, also affected by the heat, lumbered along in leisurely fashion, which was not so uncomfortable as when they cantered. We passed several large date plantations, as shady and inviting as an English wood, and noisy with the cries of jays and parakeets. Brilliant-hued butterflies darted among the palm fronds, some of them measuring six inches across the wings.

Crossing a dried-up water course, or *wadhi*, we reached the foot of the hills. Of buff and pink sandstone, they sloped gradually for 300 feet, and were easily climbable for that distance. At that point they gave way to sheer cliffs of black and brown igneous rock, formidable with giant buttresses and massive boulders.
Occasionally we glimpsed passes and crevices along the slopes { 563
which were honeycombed with caves. In these, the Khan Sahib 241
informed us, the Shi'hou tribes lived. About 2,000 feet up, there 342
were plateaux in the mountains, with small valleys where the tribesmen cultivated corn and sugar canes. We saw nothing of the Shi'hou, however, and after an hour's ride entered a low-lying valley through an avenue of tall neam trees.

There were about twenty houses on this summer estate. Each 529
was a two-storied coral and plaster dwelling, with an open veranda 361
running round the top floor. A low mud wall and a wicket gate divided the properties, each of which had its guard of sleepy-looking Arabs armed with rifles. We dismounted in front of the gateway, leaving our camels in charge of the guard. In contrast to the 247
surrounding desert, the garden was like an illustration from the *Arabian Nights' Entertainment.* White and crimson roses flourished in pots on either side of the path, whilst masses of red and purple bougainvillea trailed over the veranda. There was even a small
[Near Ras-al-Khaimah -- Analyst]

247 patch of lawn, kept green and fresh by a little fountain, which derived its water supply from a stream running at the foot of the hills. The air was full of the fragrance of flowers, and bees and butterflies were busily gorging themselves on nectar.

000 After a wash, we sat on the terrace, enjoying the panorama of desert and mountain range which stretched before us until it melted in a violet haze. Lunch was served in one of the ground floor rooms and consisted of cold chicken and rice which we had brought with us. The Khan Sahib, who was an admirable host, produced Turkish cigarettes and, over coffee, informed us that it would be as well if we set back for Sharjah by three o'clock. The vehicles were now in good running order and, as there would be a full moon, we should be able to get back to the Fort by ten o'clock that night.

I was resting in an easy chair on the veranda, enjoying an after-lunch pipe, when Stanton, the radio officer, came up to me and suggested that we should take a walk in the hills. Feeling cool and refreshed at the time, I foolishly agreed with his suggestion, stipulating that we should not go far and that we must return within an hour. Taking our helmets and a revolver each, we set off at a smart pace through the valley and were soon scaling the steep sides of a ravine. I suddenly remembered that we should have informed the others of our departure, but Stanton reassured me by stating that we should soon be back.

Although the sun was uncomfortably hot, the climb was quite an easy one, and there were occasional niches and caves in the rocks where one could rest. It did not take us long to reach the top of the slope, and we stood on a flat slab of sandstone to admire the view. Even from 300 feet we could see the slopes of Jebel-al Fayhia, the red sandstone peak which is used as a landmark by passing aircraft. The date plantations and the gardens looked like small allotments from that height, whilst beyond the desert spread out like a khaki blanket. Above us towered the high peaks of Ruus-al-Jebel, curiously carved and castellated by a million years of rain and wind. Parts of the mountain were impassable, their volcanic boulders being sufficiently steep to daunt the most skilled mountaineer. To our right, however, there was a crack in the rocks about five feet wide, culminating in a series of crude steps surmounted by a wide sill. Stanton, who wished to take a photograph of the panorama, suggested that we should climb to this ledge. It appeared to be only a few minutes' climb, so I assented.

From the top of the ledge we obtained a much better view of

[Shi'hou]

the surrounding country, and Stanton took several photographs. 000 A large brown eagle hovered curiously above us as we stood there, circling high above the peaks, and it appeared that its eyrie was in some near-by chimney. The crevice widened above us and was floored with loose stones and boulders, suggesting that at one time a mountain stream had flowed through here on its way to the foothills from some watershed. There were even a few clumps of grass and small mountain flowers, sustained by water which dripped from the roof of a cave above. While I was gazing at the view, Stanton disappeared. Annoyed at the delay which this would entail, for we should by now have begun our return journey to the Khan Sahib's house, I shouted for him to turn back. There was no reply, however, so I began to follow him up the crevice.

After a climb of five minutes, I found Stanton awaiting me at the top of the crevice. He was very excited and pointed ahead of him. Raising myself on the ledge, I looked down on a surprising
sight. Below us, hemmed in by high peaks* was a plateau or bowl- 563
shaped valley in which cattle were grazing in the long grass. The 609
sight was so lovely and so unexpected that I could not suppress a cry of admiration. A little stream, crystal clear, meandered through the valley, issuing as a miniature waterfall from the rocks. Along its banks grew dwarf camel thorns, acacias and clumps of mountain daisies. There were no human beings in sight, but near the cliff edge we noticed a hut-like habitation in front of which rose the blue smoke of a wood fire.

'This must be one of the *Shi'hou* encampments,' Stanton whispered eagerly. 'I'd give anything for a photograph of one of the blighters. Do you realize that very few white men have ever seen them?'

I shrugged impatiently and pointed out that it was nearly three o'clock already. We had promised the Khan Sahib that we should be ready to leave for Mahrid at three and pick up our cars. There was no controlling Stanton's eagerness, however. He was a much younger man than I, he had never been East before, and he was determined to take as many photographs of Arabs as his film ration would allow. Before I could restrain him he had scrambled down into the valley and was making towards the hut. I reached him just as he was focusing his lens. At that moment the figure of a woman, unveiled and clad in filthy rags, rushed shrieking out of the hut and made towards a cave in the hillside.

*[In the hills near Ras-al-Khaimah --Analyst.

[Shi'hou]

563 609 The situation was getting a little out of hand. I seized Stanton by the arm and urged him back towards the crevice up which we had come. Hardly had we reached the end of the valley when a dozen emaciated Arabs, with long beards, and rifles in their hands, suddenly appeared from behind a row of neam trees. They were slowly moving towards the entrance to the crevice, from which they must have watched us emerge, intent on cutting off our retreat. Before we could draw our revolvers one of them had fired his rifle, the bullet striking the rock cliff behind us.

Stanton yelled and dashed towards a hole in the rocks. We ran like hares to the cave, bullets spattering the rocks all round us, and reached the entrance just in time. We held a brief council of war and decided that, with a dozen rounds each, we could just about hold our own, since the cave was a natural fort and was better suited for defence than for attack. To our consternation the twelve *Shi'hou* were soon joined by about twenty more armed men who began to creep towards our hiding place. We realized that it was useless to try and shoot our way out, and replacing our revolvers in their holsters, awaited the outcome. The *Shi'hou*, who by now stood outside the cave yelling and gesticulating with their rifles, were an extraordinary-looking lot. Shorter than the average Arab, they had a much wilder look, with long hair and beards. Each man carried a curious little axe, no bigger than a hammer, attached to a long pole. Their faces were rounder and much less Semitic than the Arabs', and of a reddish-brown colour. A few strips of cotton saved them from complete nudity, and their arms and legs were covered with silver rings. 142 [411]

563 609 The only member of the tribe who wore a head-dress—a strip of dirty white cloth worn in the manner of a turban—stepped forward and spoke to us in the strange dialect of his tribe. I knew some Arabic and recognized one word which, roughly translated, meant 'Come out'. As we left the cave and stood before him they yelled more wildly than before, no doubt demanding our blood as the price of violating the sanctity of their hills. The headman silenced them and began to jabber at us violently, gesticulating fiercely with his hands. After five minutes of this haranguing, he seemed to realize that we did not understand him and glared at us impatiently.

486 563 'What about the *ghuli chit?*' Stanton whispered in my ear, and I suddenly remembered the pass which the Sheikh of Sharjah had provided me with. This was a piece of paper, headed with the

[Shi 'hou]

sheikh's name and address in Arabic, and a statement in the same 486
language to the effect that the bearer had his permission to travel 563
through Oman without let or hindrance. It also offered dire penalties, including the amputation of the right hand, to any who dared to show violence to the bearer. Unfolding this rather dirty piece of paper I handed it to the headman. He held it gingerly in his fingers, gazing at it suspiciously, and pretended to read it although it was upside down. With a shrug he then handed it to another tribesman, but this man could make nothing of the document either.

Although they could not understand Arabic script, I think they must have had some inkling of its meaning, for they began a violent altercation amongst themselves. One of them suddenly pointed
in the direction of Ras-al-Khaimah, and then at us. Beginning to 577
get rather tired of all this pantomime, I decided to take decisive 609
measures. There is a rule in the desert, at least among the Bedouins, that if you are attacked you should seize the garment of the most respectable Arab and cry: '*Daheel*', which means 'protection'. Under the unwritten laws of Arab hospitality, he is obliged to keep you in safe custody for at least twenty-four hours. The principle is not unlike that obtaining in the Middle Ages, when the outlaw could enter a church and claim sanctuary from the clergy.

I had no idea how it would work with the *Shi'hou*, but I was determined to try. Dashing forward I seized the scanty hem of the headman's *kufiyeh* and yelled '*Daheel*' at the top of my voice. To my surprise the old man's face was suddenly contorted with
fear, and he stepped back as though I had struck him a blow. His [522]
rapid action resulted in a piece of the rotten cloth coming away in my hands and he was left almost naked. The effect of his predicament on the other *Shi'hou* was astonishing. At first amazement, then amusement, was written on their faces. Some grinned widely, others burst into shrieks of laughter. Even the headman, who had covered up his bare limbs as best he could with a few shreds of cloth, was grinning sheepishly. All signs of hostility had vanished. With a gesture the headman beckoned us towards the hut from which the shrieking woman had emerged.

Closely followed by a still laughing bodyguard, we marched 342
towards the hut. The headman entered first, directing us to follow 516
him. It was dark and dirty inside as well as hot and foul-smelling. Our hosts squatted on the bare floor in a circle, which we joined.

[Shi'hou]

576 The woman whose fiendish caterwauling had brought the wrath
562 of the tribe down on our heads, now appeared decently veiled, a large metal bowl in her hands. This was passed round the circle, each partaker making a sucking noise as he drank. It required some courage to put one's lips to the bowl after it had been licked by those bearded ruffians, but the camel's milk it contained was cool and sweet. A dish of dates, covered with flies, was next produced, and out of sheer politeness we helped ourselves to a small portion. They tasted of fermentation and were full of grit.

415 While we were seated with our strange hosts I looked around the
316 hut and noticed several pots and pans, very crudely made of a yellowish metal. Lifting one of these up, I handed it to the headman and indicated with a gesture that I should like to know what it was made of. The old man pointed to the mountains and grunted '*ga'ar*', which I found out afterwards was the *Shi'hou* word for gold. Apparently there are considerable veins of this mineral in the hills; it is smelted by the tribesmen who sell a proportion of it to the lowland Arabs, but also use it for their domestic utensils. Tin is also mined or washed in the streams.

576 When we could stand no longer the heat and stench of the hut we stood up and indicated to the headman that we should like to leave. He grinned very affably and, taking us by the hand, led us across the valley towards the crevice. The tribesmen followed, shouting and laughing and firing their rifles into the air. When we reached the top of the crevice we shook hands all round, a custom which they appeared to understand, and then thanked them in Arabic for their hospitality, which they did not understand, but which seemed to amuse them nevertheless. Just before we left them the headman unclasped his silver *hangar* from his waist and presented it to me. I have it still.

000 Our descent down the mountainside was much quicker than our ascent had been. We could hear the tribesmen's rifles cracking away in the valley, and feared that they might suddenly change their minds again and begin firing at us. Fortunately no untoward incidents occurred, apart from Stanton losing his foothold and falling twenty feet down a sharp escarpment, thereby skinning his arm from wrist to elbow. Within half an hour we had reached the base of the foothills and could see the Khan Sahib's house in the distance. The time was now five o'clock and I realized that the rest of the party would be getting somewhat impatient.

We found the Khan Sahib pacing up and down his beautiful

DOO

garden. He raised his hands in horror when he saw our torn and dirty clothing.

'Where in Allah's name have you been?' he asked, for once exasperated out of his Oriental calm. 'We had given you up as lost and have sent a search party to look for you.' He was slightly mollified when we gave him a brief account of our misadventures, and insisted on regaling us with glasses of sherbet. The others were very much amused by our tale of woe, and laughed as heartily as the *Shi'hou* had done when I told them the story of the torn *kufiyeh*.

The camels were waiting impatiently outside the garden and we mounted them and were soon trotting off towards Mahrid. By the time we had filled the vehicles with petrol and water and were ready to start back for Sharjah it was six o'clock. The sun was setting behind the sandhills and the desert, now grown cool, was suffused with a rosy glow. By eight o'clock we were slipping and sliding down the steep sides of the sandhills. Darkness had set in and the first stars glittered in the sky, Aldebaran and the Dog Star, like ice-white fires. With thirty miles behind us, and shivering with the cold, we saw the full moon slowly rise, like a great opaque bowl of ice, from a ridge ahead of us. At that moment the leading truck decided to break down. Wearily we clambered out and lit a fire of dry neam twigs, while Sparkes and Suleman Beg tinkered with the engine.

By nine o'clock they had got the engine going again and we ploughed our way through drifts of loose sand until the Hadaitha Valley was reached. Just as we entered it the station wagon broke down. We were about to light another fire and warm ourselves when Frew pointed to a glimmer of light in the distance. It looked as if it might be an Arab encampment, so we decided to trek towards it in the hope of getting some assistance, for our vehicle was stuck fast in the sand. Leaving Sparkes and the driver in charge of the vehicles, we trudged across the sandhills and in about half an hour came upon, not, as we had thought, an Arab camp, but a convoy of the Locust Commission's trucks. They had made a halt for the night and were cooking their evening meal over a paraffin stove.

The Indian in charge of the convoy was very pleased to see us, particularly when he knew we were friends of his chief, Captain Joyce, and made us sit down to a sumptuous meal of curried stew and billycans of boiling tea. After an hour's wait Sparkes joined

000 us. He had repaired the station wagon and had towed it out of the sand with the aid of the battle-wagon. We waited for him to have a good meal and then started off on the last lap of our return journey. This was uneventful, although we missed the road several times, and eventually reached the Fort at two o'clock in the morning.

I shall always remember that ride. The desert, gleaming like snow in the moonlight, melted on the horizon into a bluish, transparent haze; grotesque shapes, the shadows of rocks and palm trees, receded obliquely as the cars advanced, and occasionally opalesque eyes, from a startled gazelle, fox or wild dog, reflected the glare of our headlights.

## BOOK TWO

## *DESERT WARFARE*

### CHAPTER V

ALTHOUGH a large-scale tribal war, involving hostilities between rival sheikhs, has not occurred in the Trucial Oman territory since 1940, occasional raids by nomadic tribes take place from time to time. These affairs are very different from tribal wars, and usually not more than fifty men are engaged in a village raid. A night is chosen when the moon is in the first quarter, since this gives them sufficient light to reach their objective, yet makes it easy for them to conceal themselves. At midnight, or in the early hours of dawn, the raiders will steal towards the outskirts of the town or village they intend to attack, tethering their camels in the shadow of a building or clump of palms. The nearest houses will be raided first, and any slaves, children, livestock or goods and chattels they find will be carried off. Sometimes a woman's screams will give the alarm, and the sheikh's guards rush to the spot before the raiders have time to get away. A pitched battle in the desert then takes place, no quarter being given by either side. Most raids are so carefully planned beforehand, however, that the raiders often escape with their booty before the alarm can be raised.

During the time that I was stationed at Sharjah, only two serious raids were made on local villages. On one night in January, however, a daring raid was made on the R.A.F. and American camps and some medical stores stolen. The medical encampment was situated on a hill about half a mile from the main camp in which all the military and R.A.F. units were centrally situated. It was thus in a rather lonely position, although it was surrounded by a strong fence of barbed-wire. In this camp were the hospital, sick quarters and the Medical Officer's room. The M.O. was suddenly awakened in the early hours of the morning by someone tugging at his blanket. He seized a revolver from under his

721 pillow and fired twice at a shadowy figure which darted out of the tent, and then gave the alarm. The emergency floodlights were switched on, and shortly afterwards a truckload of Indian troops reached the camp and began to fire into the darkness, but the raiders had fled. In the morning it was discovered that hundreds of blankets, sheets, provisions and some hospital equipment, including chairs, had been stolen. There was a piece of bloodstained cloth on the barbed-wire, suggesting that one of the raiders had been winged. We felt rather sorry for the M.O., but could not help smiling at the thief's impudence in attempting to steal his blanket while he slept.

694 The Sheikh of Sharjah was approached by the Political Officer
and told politely that he would be held responsible for the raid,
since it had occurred on his territory. As the value of the stolen
goods totalled something like £100, Sultan bin Saqr decided very
694 quickly that something must be done. Like many of the sheikhs,
151 he employs several skilled trackers. These men are the detectives
of the desert, and have an uncanny knack of hounding down a
criminal. Footprints mean everything to them, and it is said that
they can tell the age of a camel, and the district to which it belongs,
from the shape of its spoor. They can distinguish the feet of a
woman from those of a man, and even reconstruct from the
depth of a foot-impression what a person was doing at a particular
time; they can also assess fairly accurately when the footprints
were made. In his *Alarms and Excursions*, Bertram Thomas tells
an amusing story which illustrates the trackers' skill; it was first
told to me by Haji Williams, an old English adventurer who has
spent fifty years in the desert and has now turned Mohammedan
and married an Arab wife.

The incident occurred in Bahrain. An old Arab merchant was very worried about the non-return of his daughter from the market. As she did not return that night, the following day he hired a professional tracker and told him to find her. The tracker soon came upon the footprints of the merchant's daughter, but by the side of them he also found a thin trail in the sand, as if made by some kind of blunt instrument. At first he was puzzled, then enlightenment came to him, and he returned to the merchant to inform him that his daughter had spent the night in the desert with a man. The merchant was so shocked and enraged at hearing this that when eventually his daughter put in an appearance he refused to allow her to enter his house. Falling on her knees, she pleaded that no man had been near her that night. On being 694 questioned, she admitted that she had stopped to gather some 151 *fagar* on the way home, darkness had fallen and she had lost her way. She had spent the night most respectably, sleeping under a neam tree. (To understand this incident, it should be explained [262] that the *fagar* is a kind of edible fungus, much liked by the Arabs, and that in shape it curiously resembles the phallus.)

The trackers employed by the Sheikh of Sharjah were reputed to be the cleverest in Arabia. That afternoon I had gone for a [361] walk to the Sheikh's Wells, a delightful spot about two miles from the fort, whence we obtained our water supply. The area is covered with flower and vegetable gardens, and guarded by one of the round stone watch-towers which one finds on the outskirts of most Arab towns. The Sheikh and his Ministers arrived in a smart Hudson automobile, followed by the Khan Bahadur, Abdur bin Razzak, in his sedan. They were met by two trackers on camels, and proceeded to hold a conference.

Fifteen minutes later the trackers set off for the hospital, picked up the tracks of the raiders, and were soon galloping off in the desert at a smart pace in the direction of Baraimi. This is a small market town in the middle of a trackless desert. The territory is not claimed by any sheikh, although several have tried to possess it. For hundreds of years it has remained neutral ground, and its [474] famous date plantations represent the only example of co-operation [245] among the tribes, for each has a share in the crop. Baraimi is not [576] only a centre for the slave trade, but is a refuge for criminals.

We heard later that the raiders had been traced to Dhaid, but that the trackers had been unable to arrest them. They were in hiding with about a hundred other brigands, and there are limits to the courage of a tracker. Compensation for the thefts was paid to the R.A.F. authorities, and it was a rather curious fact that, several months later, sheets and blankets, bearing the R.A.F. tabs, were found in local houses.

Desert raiders are usually the 'bad boys' of their tribe, and their [183] conduct does not always reflect the character of the tribe as a whole. 685 Some tribes pride themselves on their honesty and deal very sternly with offenders. If a tribesman of the Beni Qitab is caught in the act of stealing or raiding, the Sheikh Mahomed, the patriarch who rules this tribe, will make himself personally responsible for the thief's apprehension and punishment. This may take the form of amputating the right arm, branding, or the more barbarous punish-

685 ment of 'the hooks'. A thief condemned to this terrible sentence
may well blench. He is dropped from a high wall or tower on to
sharp hooks which project from the wall. With his limbs securely
skewered, he is left hanging in the pitiless sun until the vultures
end his misery, leaving a whitened skeleton as a warning to wantons.
Influential prisoners are cast into the palace dungeons without light
or food, and garrotted quietly in the night by their gaolers. Branding
and flogging are also common forms of punishment in Arabia.

721 A fair amount of desert raiding is still carried on in the Jebel
Shamailiyah district, the range of mountains between Oman and
Muscat, and at Sinash, a lonely town in the hills, the *Wali*, or
Sultan's Viceroy, has been obliged to use draconian means of dealing
with brigands, who sometimes resort to ransom and are a menace
to peaceful merchants who use the pass. Not long ago one of the
683 Sultan's brothers was abducted and carried off into the hills. The
ransom demanded—a heavy one—was paid, but a year later the
ringleader and several of his men were caught by the Sultan's
trackers. They suffered some unpleasant tortures before they were
finally put out of their sufferings by being hanged. Their property
was confiscated and their unfortunate relatives were obliged to pay
674 several time the amount of the ransom. Crime does not pay in
Arabia, unless you are on the winning side. Yet the bandit and
the camel raider persist in their vocations in spite of all discouragement.
181 The Arab is prepared to fight—to the death, if necessary,
577 for that which he steals, and this is a spirit which all Arabs
admire.

567 Young Arab boys and girls, as well as slaves and Persian servants,
are sometimes carried off by the raiders, and at one time I was
obliged to provide an armed guard for the Fort bearers, as they were
terrified to return to Sharjah at night, a distance of one mile, unless
accompanied. Haider, my personal bearer, a youth of fifteen,
told me that he had once been attacked at night, and for a time I
allowed him to sleep in one of the mess rooms. High prices are
fetched in the slave market for young people, who are sold to
merchants or pearling fleet owners and treated little better than
negro slaves. A fifteen years old Persian boy may fetch as much as
2,000 rupees, and a girl about 1,500. Negroes fetch only half this
amount. The British authorities are aware that a traffic in slaves
is carried on in Oman, but claim that they have been unable to
obtain any evidence of it. Since I have met slaves who complained
to me that they had been abducted and sold in the market, and once

paid a secret visit to the slave market at Baraimi, I consider this to be a very poor excuse. If it is too much to ask the Political Officer to investigate the slave traffic, it is surely not beyond the powers of the Indian Government to employ confidential agents who could obtain all the evidence they needed.

An exceptionally bad case came before the Political Officer in 1944. A sickly and emaciated Persian, of about thirty years of age, came to his office one day and told a remarkable story. This man stated that he had been a merchant at Dubai and had dealt in carpets and pearls. In 1939 he was travelling on foot between Dubai and Sharjah, and had about 2,000 rupees' worth of pearls on him, as well as some rupee notes, representing the day's takings. He was suddenly set upon by a band of raiders, who tied him with ropes to a camel, and rode off into the desert. He was cast into a filthy room in some distant town, badly treated and beaten, and eventually sold in the slave market. His owner was a brute, who beat and half-starved him, and a year later he was sold to a merchant on the coast near Bahrain. He worked in this man's house and was cruelly treated, being placed in chains for the slightest offence. Eventually he escaped, took refuge in the house of a Persian merchant, who gave him some money and advised him to make his way back to Sharjah and report the matter to the British authorities.

The Political Officer listened sympathetically to his story, and promised to report the case to the British Resident at Basrah. He admitted to me afterwards, however, that there was little that the authorities could do. The man seemed to have no evidence of his capture and enslavement; he could not identify his captors, and could not even prove that he had the pearls or money on him at the time of his capture. To the best of my belief nothing was done in the matter; the poor wretch received no compensation, and was obliged to return to Persia penniless. Yet there were portions of his story which could easily have been corroborated, and the marks on his legs where he had been kept in chains were sufficient evidence of his treatment.

A few days after the attack on the medical camp, we heard 000
that a similar attack had been made on the American encampment. Major Raimer, the commanding officer, had placed extra guards around the camp following the first attack, and one of these guards, a tough Chicagoan, thought he saw a figure creeping round the wire. He fired his Tommy-gun and was startled by the scream

000 which followed the shot. The floodlights were switched on, and an Arab was seen limping off into the desert. This incident had an unfortunate result. I heard that the injured man was not a bandit at all, but a peaceful Arab who was on his way back to Sharjah from his garden at the Sheikh's Wells. Just what he was doing in his garden at midnight no one could explain, but it appeared that his family were extremely indignant at the outrage and demanded that the American soldier should be handed over to the sheikh for justice. The sheikh naturally refused, since he had given Major Raimer *carte blanche* to shoot any raiders who attacked the camp or molested the troops; the guard could hardly be blamed for making a mistake.

The next day I was warned by the R.A.F. Adjutant that some trouble was afoot, and that he had been informed by the Khan Bahadur's secret agents that an attack might be made on the American camp that night. This news occasioned a certain amount of tension and excitement, and the R.A.F. had taken emergency precautions to deal with any rising. At dusk I instructed our engineers to test the defence lights on the roof of the Fort, and also the Chance light, a large electric beacon used for aiding aircraft in emergency landings. The Adjutant asked me not to switch on these lights until he gave the signal. We felt that we could deal with the situation adequately, since the Fort was well fortified, and could only be taken by superior numbers of well-armed forces, and we did not expect this raid to be anything more than a sporadic affair.

The situation was complicated, unfortunately, by the presence in the Fort of about twenty passengers from a Sunderland flying-boat which had force-landed in the Creek at Dubai that afternoon. Of this number, five were women, including one with a baby. I discussed the situation with the Commander of the aircraft, Squadron-leader 'Lofty' Steer, a six foot four New Zealander, who seemed to treat the whole affair as a joke. Actually, this was a sensible way of dealing with a crisis which had not yet arisen and which might not develop. All we had to do was to be prepared and on the alert, and Steer requested that he and the members of his crew should be allowed to assist in the defence of the Fort.

Darkness fell, and all was quiet and normal. We went over to the R.A.F. Mess as usual for a drink before dinner and, apart from an additional number of guards posted around the camp, it did not seem different from any other night. The Mess, of course, was full of excited whispers about the expected raid, and some coarse jokes were made about the nameless tortures which the raiders were likely to inflict on any captives. Most of the jokes were launched at the Fort and its inhabitants, and how they would be rescued from a long siege by the R.A.F. This was the Service way of getting its own back on the Corporation, which provided living accommodation and domestic comforts far superior to anything enjoyed by the R.A.F. officers or men. The reason for this, of course, was the fact that the Fort was primarily designed and intended for the accommodation of paying passengers.

We returned to the Fort and had dinner and, just as I was taking coffee, I was called to the telephone by my bearer. It was the Adjutant; he informed me that groups of Arabs had been spotted in the vicinity of the camp by a reconnaissance party, and it was believed that an attack was imminent. He added that the camp would be warned by siren, and asked me to switch on the defence lights. My first action was to order the Askhari guards to shut and lock the double iron doors at the entrance, and to stand-by until further orders; other guards were immediately posted to various positions on the roof. The defence lights were switched on just as the camp siren sounded, and I hurried down to my office to hold a conference with my senior officers and the aircraft Commander. 'Lofty' Steer had already informed the passengers of the situation, and the ladies were requested to remain in the lounge until the danger was over.

I had about eighteen Service rifles in my office and these were handed out to the staff, together with several rounds of ammunition. The ammunition was very old; in fact, it was reputed to be part of the huge stock with which the War Office supplied Colonel Lawrence during his war against the Turks. It was quite effective, however, as we had used several hundred rounds on the rifle range. 'Lofty' Steer and I each took charge of one of the towers, whilst the remainder of the staff took up their stations on the roof. The only flaw in our plans was a defect in the wiring of the Chance beacon, which had a most powerful beam, but one of the mechanics was busily working on this.

At nine o'clock we were startled by a single shot in the darkness. It was followed by a volley which appeared to come from a north-westerly direction. We could see nothing, but the air was suddenly filled with yells and groans and the chatter of a machine-gun. Some of my defenders imagined they saw the

000 shadows of attackers, and fired wildly through the loopholes. Jock Frew, the coxswain, did wing one man, for his shot was followed by a fearful yell. The raiders seemed to be firing in all directions and to have no concerted plan. Just as we were beginning to wonder whether a rush would be made on the Fort, the Chance beacon suddenly burst into light. Its powerful beams illuminated the desert all around the camp, and by its aid we were able to pick out crouching figures of the raiders. There did not seem to be more than fifty of them, and the Chance beacon must have put the fear of Allah into them, for they quickly turned on their heels and ran towards a nullah.

An R.A.F. lorry, filled with troops, came lumbering through the camp, spattering machine-gun bullets towards the retreating foe, and a few hand-grenades were thrown. That was the end of the raid. British casualties were nil, whilst the Arabs lost one man who was taken to hospital with a wound in his thigh and later handed over to the sheikh for a different kind of treatment. Everyone agreed that it had been a 'good show', and we adjourned to the Mess to celebrate our victory.

I mentioned the affair very briefly in my monthly report to Regional Headquarters at Karachi, and was rather surprised to receive a reprimand from the Regional Director, who stated curtly: 'Rifles and ammunition should not be issued except in cases of extreme urgency'.

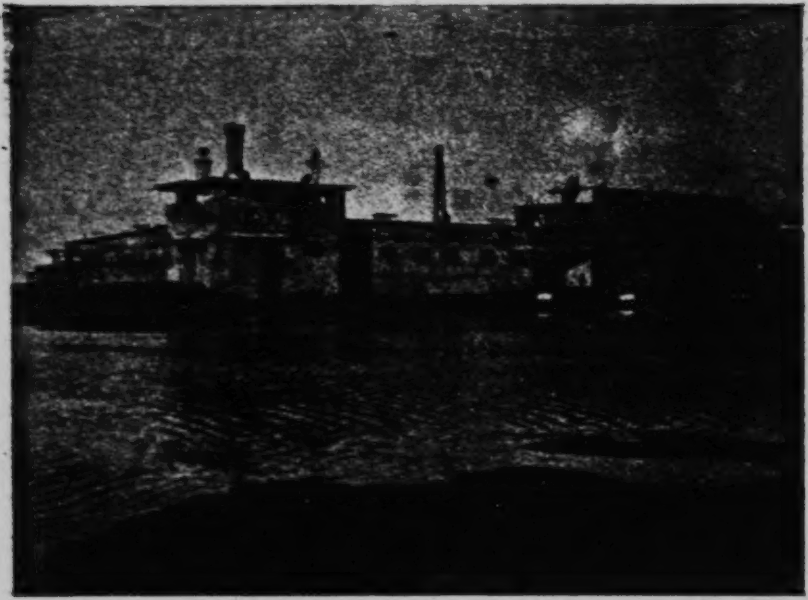
There were no further raids on the camp following that attack, and I believe our vigorous defence measures took the Arabs by surprise. They had imagined that we were weak and insufficiently armed, and had probably hoped to get away with some booty. In the past, life at Sharjah was apt to be exciting, the routine of the Fort being enlivened by raids and tribal wars between rival sheikhs. Former Station Managers had to be in a state of perpetual armed preparedness, and during the command of Wing-Commander Clive Adams, in 1940, when the Sheikhs of Sharjah and Dubai were at war, the journey from Sharjah to Dubai was fraught with peril. Cannon balls whizzed across the desert from fort to fort, to be retrieved later by the retainers of the respective disputants, and used again. At first the rival armies used to fire on our vehicles, but on representations being made to the sheikhs by the Political Officer, the contesting parties agreed to hold a truce while our vehicles passed, provided our cars bore a white flag.

622

Sheikh Mahomed bin Ali, eighty-year-old ruler of the Beni Qitab tribe

following p 60 (a)

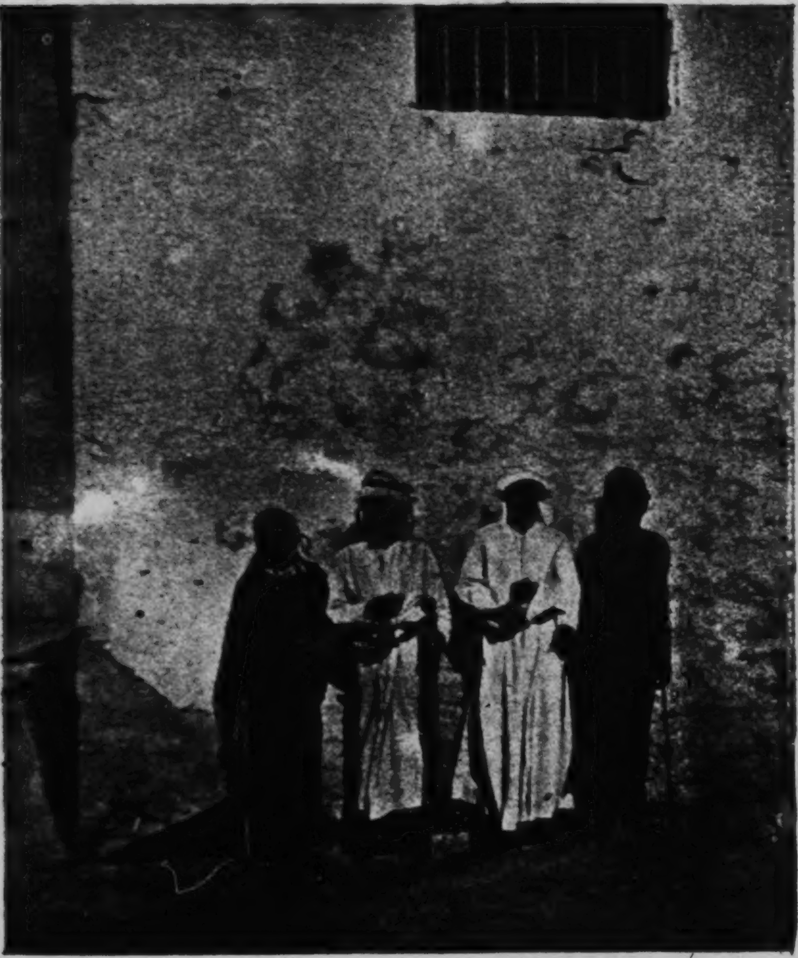
712



The Fort at Sharjah, during flood

following page 60(b)

291



Four of the Askhari guards who watch over the Fort at Sharjah. They are natives of Muscat

following p 60 (c)

137

A fine clump of acacia, or neam trees, at Umm-al-Quwain. Called *gharf* by the Arabs, they provide a good shade for men and cattle, and are a sign of underground water

following p. 60 (d).

000

A close-up of the Fort garden, showing my bearer, Haider, with two prize cabbages. The cannon in the background is of the George III period, and was captured from a frigate by pirates

following p 60 (e)

2: O'Shea G-3 (1944-1945) 1947 MK4 Trucial Oman MK4

622
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H.H. Sheikh Sultan bin Saqr of Sharjah, with his ten-year-old son, Abdul, and Mr. Jasim, the Residency Agent

following p 60 (f)

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One of the falcon-hawks kept by the Sheikh of Al 'Ajman and used for hunting wild bustard

following p. 60 (g)

291

Hussein, Wazir of Al 'Ajman, with two of the Sheikh's horses and their grooms

following p. 60 (h)

721 There were no tribal wars during my stay at Sharjah, one of the
713 reasons for this being the shortage of ammunition. The sheikhs are allowed a small ration of ammunition for defence against desert raiders, but this is insufficient for purposes of war. The Arabs were obliged to find other means of obtaining bullets. Thefts from the R.A.F. and American camps were frequent, and on one occasion several thousand rounds were stolen. The culprits were never caught, but some of the ammunition was later traced to the private armoury of a local sub-sheikh. Condemned ammunition stocks provide another source of supply. When the R.A.F. dumped a hundred cases of condemned .303 bullets into the creek, Arab pearl divers who had been waiting in readiness plunged into the water and brought most of it ashore.

In the heart of the desert, away from towns or villages, the shortage of ammunition often proves a hardship to the tribes, who
389 rely on their rifles for much of their food supplies. They are thus obliged to manufacture their own cartridges, filling them with a home-made gunpowder obtained from the *ashgar* bush, the stems of which contain saltpetre. It is not a very satisfactory preparation, and many of the hunters have blown themselves up, but that has not proved a deterrent.

703 The Arab is a born fighter; as a child he learns to handle the
857 curved *hangar*, or dagger, and to shoot gazelle with the silver
725 damascened rifle which his father stole from the British. They are good shots, cunning in guerilla warfare; they will lie flat on their bellies, half-hidden by the scrub, and approach their enemies like snakes. Unfortunately they take very poor care of their arms; their rifles become corroded and clogged with dirt and are apt to explode in their faces when fired. Yet their daring tactics and fanaticism make them a formidable fighting force, and the sheikhs' armies, recruited from amongst the wild tribesmen, would prove a serious obstacle even to trained modern armies if the Arabs were united.

721 As long as the present sheikhs are in power, and the British Residency Agent, the Khan Bahadur Abdur bin Razzak (who has retired to his estates at Quait since this was written), exercises authority at Sharjah, tribal war is unlikely to break out on the Trucial Oman coast. The Khan Bahadur controls a large body of Arab spies in every town, hamlet and camp, and the slightest whisper of a revolt reaches him with little delay. In any event, war between the town sheikhs, who are for the most part related

721 [361] to one another by marriage, is extremely unlikely. Internecine war is likely only between the nomadic tribes who roam the desert and avoid the towns; they live in goats' hair tents, congregating around the wells and oases in the hot season. [622] The largest and most powerful of these tribes in Oman is that of the Beni Qitab, whose Sheikh is the Mohamed Ali, a fine, tall, white-bearded warrior with a hawk-like nose and piercing eyes. As he is at present on friendly terms with the Khan Bahadur, war against the town sheikhs is unlikely.

# CHAPTER VI

THE last war of any importance, as I have stated, was that between 721
Sharjah and Dubai in 1940. The cause of the war was a long- 619
standing feud between the tribes of Bani Yas (Dubai) and Qasimi
(Sharjah). There was also a dispute over territorial limits claimed
by the sheikhs. The sheikhdom of Dubai is composed of two 361
distinct districts; Dubai town proper, on the west of the creek, and 443
Dera, on the north side. The largest and better-built houses,
mostly inhabited by Indian and Persian merchants, as well as the
more important shops of the pearl brokers, carpet sellers and gold-
smiths, are situated in Dubai town. Here one finds cool, clean
narrow streets with high walls, often overhung with Persian rugs
to keep off the sun, and pleasant open shops where one may buy
anything from a five hundred years' old Bokhara rug or a brass-
bound Quaiti chest, to an American wrist-watch or a roll of bread.
In the poorer section of Dera, where the fishermen and coolies live,
there is a native bazaar and several long streets of shops, but these
are dirty, dark and infested with flies.. There one may buy items
of gaudy Arab clothing, tobacco leaves, and dried food, including
fish, spices, nuts, ghee butter, henna bark and rice. Some alley- [326]
ways are devoted entirely to silversmiths and tinsmiths; the latter
are clever craftsmen and can make almost any domestic utensil out
of an empty petrol can.

For several hundred years Dubai (which includes, besides the 619
town, several villages and a tract of desert of about fifty square 622
miles), has been ruled by the Al Bu Falaah branch of the Bani Yas
clan, who are related to another Al Bu Falaah family, the sheikhs of
Abu Dhabi (the 'Place of Gazelles'). Rivalry between the sheikhs
of Dubai and their cousins in Dera, on the other side of the creek,
may be traced back as far as 1850, when the Ak Bu Mahair family,
their cousins, intrigued for ownership of the region. The Mahair
were notorious pirates. A British gunboat had occasion to land a
ship's crew at Dera to investigate an attack on a merchant ship in
Dubai waters. Soon after the sailors from the gunboat had
landed they were waylaid in a dark side street and murdered; as a

619 reprisal, the gunboat shelled Dera Town, destroying many houses
622 and killing several of the inhabitants. The British Government then confirmed Maktum bin Buti, of the Bani Yas tribe, as Sheikh of the whole of Dubai, including Dera. Since then there has been unmitigated rivalry between the two houses.

622 The present ruler of Dubai, Sheikh Said bin Maktum, a grand-
721 son of Maktum bin Buti, is a peaceably disposed ruler, but his wife, Husa, or Umm Raschid (mother of Raschid) is a combination of Catharine the Great and Boadicea, and is ambitious into the bargain for her two sons, Raschid and Khalifa. In 1940, following an intrigue against the Sheikh of Dubai, a member of the Mahair family was obliged to flee from Dubai and took refuge with the Sheikh of Sharjah, claiming his protection. Husa demanded that he be handed over to her, but this Sultan bin Saqr resolutely refused to do, contending that such an act was against all the traditions of his race. Feeling between Sharjah and Dubai had run rather high for several years, partly over a dispute as to which sheikh should have suzerainty over Hera, a minor sheikhdom, and partly because Sheikh Said bin Maktum disputed Sultan bin Saqr's succession to the sheikhdom of Sharjah.

The war which broke out over this incident lasted for several months, and was mainly guerilla in its tactics, although siege was laid to Dubai and the town was gallantly and successfully defended under the generalship of Husa herself, an event almost unparalleled in Arab history. It appeared that her husband had not wanted a war at all, and had tried to persuade his ministers to call a conference with Sultan bin Saqr and settle their quarrel by negotiation. This move not proving successful, the Sheikh of Dubai shut himself up in his room and refused to see anyone. His sons were not keen on fighting, either, and Raschid the elder, a pleasant, cultured man of thirty, continued his life of social ease, visiting his gardens by motor-car, adding to his collection of wives, and smoking his tiny-stemmed pipe. Husa was so infuriated by their indifference that she tore the veil from her face, donned sword and trousers, and took command of the fort and the army.

721 The total number of casualties on both sides numbered only about two hundred, dead and wounded, and at length the offices of the British Government were sought to mediate between the contestants. If the matter had been adjudicated by a court of arms, the laurels would probably have gone to Sharjah, which did much material damage to Dubai Town. At any rate, the peace

treaty was signed in the Sheikh of Sharjah's palace in the presence of the Political Officer, who thenceforward took up his official residence at Sharjah.

To understand the intrigues and quarrels which were part of the normal relationship between the Oman sheikhs, one has to glance back to the middle of the last century, when the sheikhdoms of Sharjah and Dubai came into prominence. The internal history of Trucial Oman at this time, relating chiefly to petty wars among the principalities, is confusing and monotonous, but it is not altogether without meaning or explanation. The central fact is a contest for the paramountcy between the sheikhs of Sharjah and Dubai; a contest in which, after the first, the power of Sharjah (which at one time owned most of the Trucial Oman peninsula), appeared to decline, and one by which the Sheikh of Dubai, who held the balance of power, profited so largely and so unscrupulously that the principals from time to time forgot their feud in an endeavour to exterminate him by united action.

Besides hostilities traceable to the antagonism between Sharjah and Dubai, there was, however, much desultory fighting due to predatory raids and the reprisals which they provoked, and some incidents of considerable importance arose out of aggressions by the Sheikh of Sharjah on his smaller neighbours. About 1840 it was clearly the ambition of the Sheikh of Sharjah to reduce Umm-al-Qaiwain, 'Ajman, and even Dubai itself to dependence upon himself.

In May, 1838, Sheikh Khalifa, of Abu Dhabi, in whose mind the succession of the Al Bu Falaah to Dubai still rankled deeply, made a sudden raid upon that place in the absence of the inhabitants at the pearl banks. He captured a tower upon the sea face and, after placing a garrison of his own in it, withdrew. On receiving news of the incident, the Al Bu Falaah at once returned from the pearl fishery and, assisted by Sheikh Sultan-bin-Saqr the First of Sharjah, dislodged the intruding Bani Yas after three days' operations; they also destroyed the tower. Bickering followed, but in the end a settlement was reached, and the boats of Dubai and Abu Dhabi were enabled to return to the pearl banks before the close of the season.

In 1839 a blood-feud arose between the people of Dubai and those of Umm-al-Qaiwain, in which the Sheikh of Sharjah interposed. A year later the hand of Maktum-bin-Buti, Sheikh of Dubai, was shown in the domestic affairs of the Qasimi principality

175 by Sheikh Saqr-bin-Sultan's proclaiming his independence in the town of his father, Sultan-bin-Saqr, the Qasimi sheikh. On the failure of this *coup d'etat*, during the continuance of which the influence of Sheikh Maktum had dominated Sharjah, the rebellious son was provided at Dubai with a refuge from his father's vengeance.

Seemingly stung to fury by these proceedings, Sheikh Sultan-bin-Saqr underwent a reconciliation with his arch-enemy, Sheikh Khalifa of Abu Dhabi, and it was agreed between them that, on the capture of Dubai, the town should be completely destroyed and the inhabitants obliged to remove to Abu Dhabi or Sharjah. The Sheikh of Umm-al-Qaiwain also, having been placated by the Sheikh of Sharjah, was persuaded to join in the arrangement. When matters had reached this point, the Sheikh of Sharjah, with a falseness almost incredible even in one so celebrated for that quality, suddenly accepted the submission of the Sheikh of Dubai, which was accompanied by a gift of £250, and withdrew, leaving his indignant allies to conclude the affair as best they could.

In 1841 Dubai was much weakened by the exodus of 500 discontented Al Bu Mahair, who settled at Sharjah, and at the same time the prevalence of a virulent fever in Dubai Town caused a number of the inhabitants to desert it and settle temporarily, with the written permission of Sheikh Sultan, at the place called Dairah, which, in 1824–7, had been the cause of a serious dispute between the Sheikhs of Sharjah and Abu Dhabi. Finding Dubai almost undefended in consequence of these events, and the departure of the men of the Al Bu Falaah to the pearl fishery, the Sheikh of Abu Dhabi, after securing the neutrality of the Beni Qitab and other Bedouin tribes, made a dash with 150 men upon the town, which he took and plundered, ravaging the date groves, destroying all provisions found, and burning a *batil*, the property of Sheikh Maktum of Dubai, on board of which some men were killed.

The Sheikh of Dubai enlisted the aid of his enemy, the Sheikh of Sharjah, but they collected only 200 men and feared to attack the invader, who held Jumairah, and the enterprising Khalifa-bin-Shakhbut sent out a raiding party to loot the village of Khan (a small dependence of Sharjah) in the rear, carrying off fifteen slaves.

After further petty wars, a peace was made in July, but a month later Khalifa, instigated by Sheikh Maktum, ravaged the territories of the Beni Qitab, Ghafalah and Na'im tribes, and carried off a number of the camels which had been collected for safety at Dhaid while their owners were absent on a foray in the Batinah district.

In November, 1843, in consequence of an attack by Ghafalah on a Dubai caravan, Sheikh Maktum carried fire and sword into the country of that tribe and of the Na'im, who were allies of Sheikh Sultan-bin-Saqr, which led to a rupture between the two sheikhs. An inhabitant of Sharjah having been killed by the hand of a brother of Sheikh Maktum, a crisis again occurred, and again passed over harmlessly. Finally, a direct collision took place in the interior between the Ghafalah and the Sheikh of Dubai and several men were killed on either side. The Sheikh was victorious but lost the sight of one eye.

Petty tribal wars continued throughout the century. They 721
were never on a large scale or serious enough to interfere with British interests in the Gulf, because the sheikhs were so jealous of one another that to combine was out of the question. The political game was played at its wiliest, and the practice of a sheikh was to play one ally off on another. If they had only acquired sufficient wisdom to settle their disputes amicably, co-operate on such matters as land reform, agriculture and water supply, the Oman Coast to-day might be a flourishing centre of Arab life. Instead of this, 311
the major part of it is uncultivated desert, because the people have no incentive to irrigate the land and plant cereals and vegetables; that this can be done with considerable success is evidenced by the flourishing gardens at Sheikh's Wells and at Ras-al-Khaimah.

It has never been the policy of the sheikhs to better the lot of 511
their subjects, however; as long as the people are unemployed for 228
half the year, they can be relied upon to work hard at the pearl banks during the pearling season, and thus make enough money to carry them on for several months without working. It is a pernicious system, but the pearling-fleet owners argue that if the people were regularly employed on other occupations, such as agriculture or sheep rearing, they would have no desire to go to the pearl banks and the industry would languish for want of labour.

Another reason for the gradual cessation of tribal wars was the 228
pearling industry, which is the most important feature of Arab life in the Gulf, and which necessitates the absence of a large proportion of the male inhabitants at the pearl fisheries during the two seasons of the year—April to June, and July to October. Since from

228 earliest times the sheikhs have derived a considerable proportion of their incomes from profits of the pearl trade, it is in their interest to pool their efforts during the season and abstain from hostilities. 622 The only men who are not allowed to take part in pearling are the 703 sheikh's soldiers and guards, who are continually on duty, and are not allowed to leave their respective towns without permission. They are usually recruited from various tribes, never from a single tribe; so that there is little danger of disaffection or of combination against their employer.

Our own guards at the Fort, who numbered about forty men, were supplied by the Sheikh of Sharjah, but they were not natives of Oman. Known as Askharis, they originate from the hill districts of Muscat, and are noted for their fearlessness and toughness as fighters. They were a villainous-looking lot of ruffians, but I got to know them individually very well indeed, and liked them [522] immensely. They were always fond of a joke and had a broad sense of humour, even if it was sometimes childish. I could trust them implicitly, as they were possessed of a dog-like loyalty and would have laid down their lives for me. They were immensely proud of their responsibility in guarding the Fort, and were extremely hurt on one occasion when I asked Cranley to provide an R.A.F. guard for an aircraft which, owing to an engine change, had to be retained at Sharjah for the night. They considered that they should have been entrusted with the task, and sulked about it for days. The reason for my action was not distrust of the Askharis or their capabilities as guards, but the simple fact that according to our regulations a British military guard must be provided for aircraft.

They were paid rather badly by the sheikh, and in consequence were invariably on the cadge for food and items of discarded clothing. These requests were usually made through their leader, Khofan, a fine-looking old man with a silky white beard, who was a past master in the art of asking favours. He was so courteous and kindly that it was difficult to refuse him. One of his most persistent requests was that I should provide his men with a barousti hut outside the Fort, so that in wet or cold weather they would not have to make the journey to Sharjah. I should have liked to give him his hut, but unfortunately we had no labour or materials and the Public Works Department attached to the R.A.F. were far too busy with camp enlargements to be able to oblige me.

000 I have mentioned that tribal wars were largely due to a lack of

I have mentioned that tribal wars were largely due to a lack
unity amongst the sheikhs, but there was one interesting and sig- 795
nificant period in the history of Oman when the rulers of south- 668
east Arabia were unified as a political force. This occurred towards the end of the last century and the beginning of the twentieth, when the Wahabi sect (so potent an influence in present-day Arab politics), wielded great power in Arabia and were constantly at war with Great Britain, causing us considerable irritation in the early days of our trade along the Persian Gulf.

The Wahabis were a fanatical religious sect of Mohammedans, a branch of the Sunnis. They claim descent from Ali-bin-Abi Talib, the cousin and adopted son of the Prophet Mohammed, whose daughter Fatimah he had married. The failure of Ali to succeed his father-in-law was the cause of serious dissensions in the Mohammedan world, leading to interminable wars and schisms which split the Arabs into innumerable sects, of which the Wahabis are one. These schisms have continued to the present day, and are the main reason why, in spite of the Arab League, and the efforts of King Farouk of Egypt and King Ibn Saud to unite Islam, the Arab world will never coalesce as it did in the days of Mohammed.

The Wahabis, who will be remembered in recent times for the 795
disaffection they fomented in Egypt, have always been schemers [77]
and political rebels. They are fanatical in the extreme, and are the most puritanical of all Arab sects, having little of the tolerance of the modern Arab. Their chief asset at one time was their religious and bloodthirsty intolerance, and being well-organized and trained fighters, they conquered a large part of southern and south-eastern Arabia. They held the Oman tribes in subjection and practically forced them into piracy and banditry, the purpose of this being to harass the British and cause as much political confusion as possible in the Persian Gulf. Paradoxically, it was this invasion of Wahabi influence which forced the Oman sheikhs, for the first time in history, to become united. Tribal wars ceased, because they were against the interests of the Wahabi leaders, and the sheikhs degenerated into little more than petty sub-chiefs and pirates.

At the beginning of the century, the power of the Wahabis in Arabia was finally broken. Piracy had been stamped out by the British naval authorities for many years, and by the Treaty of 1892 the Trucial Sheikhs ratified the earlier Treaty of 1853, which provided for the entire cessation of liabilities at sea amongst the signatories, and imposed on the British Government the duty of enforcing

795 peace, and obtaining reparation for maritime aggression committed in contravention of the agreement. Thus for a time order was restored in the Oman territories and the sheikhs were at liberty to wage war and undertake predatory raids, on condition that they did not permit any foreign power to intervene or acquire any interests, commercial or political, in the peninsula.

648 Towards the end of the first decade, however, another powerful influence began to make itself felt; the Ottoman Empire had already established its tentacles in Arabia, and in 1914, when British resources were strained to their utmost in various theatres of war, the Turks did their best to stir up ~~strife in Oman~~. It was not until late in 1917 that Turkish forces withdrew from the Gulf, an event which coincided with Colonel Lawrence's victorious advance in north-west Arabia, culminating in the utter defeat of the Turkish army.

000 Although the name of Lawrence was legendary throughout Arabia at the end of the last war, it is remarkable that, in the south, at any rate, very few Arabs appear to have heard of him. Although I mentioned his name to scores of educated Arabs, the only ones who remembered his name and epic feats were the Khan Bahadur Abdur-bin-Razzak, the Sheikh of Sharjah, and Sheikh Mohammed bin Ali, ruler of the Beni Qitab. Even then there was no reverence or admiration in their recollection, but rather a tendency to regard his exploits as the amusing adventures of an eccentric foreigner. I believe this fact is mentioned by Douglas Glen in his book *In the Footsteps of Lawrence*, and it is a curious commentary on the Arab character.

648
721 During the 1939–45 war, especially when the British and Dominion armies were fighting for their lives at El Alamein and Tobruk, the enemy made several attempts to foment strife in Oman and despatched spies, by way of Persia and Iraq, to incite turbulent elements amongst the tribes. Their efforts were always unsuccessful, thanks to the firm loyalty of the sheikhs, and the brilliant counter-espionage organization set up by the Khan Bahadur Abdur bin Razzak. His agents were scattered in towns and sea-ports throughout Oman and other parts of southern Arabia, and any stranger who landed on the coast was quickly trailed and his movements reported to headquarters at Sharjah. There was also an abortive movement to stir up a religious war, with the ultimate aim of freeing Arabia from the yoke of the foreigner, but this had very little success and was soon nipped in the bud. Italian or German airmen who flew over Arabia were nearly always forced

2: O'Shea G-3 (1944-1945) 1947 MK4 Trucial Oman MK4

to land, and in not a single case were they taken prisoner; the sheikhs had declared war on Germany and they had their own traditional way of dealing with prisoners. 648

The Khan Bahadur rendered invaluable service to the British Empire during the many years that he held office as Residency Agent and, apart from his successful efforts to eradicate enemy influence in the peninsula and ensure the loyalty of the tribes, he has always been a beneficent influence and has won respect and admiration for the Crown. His retirement from office in 1945 was a great loss to British interests in Oman, and there are many amongst those who were familiar with his work and influence who consider that his selfless service to the British Government should have been recognized by the honour of knighthood. He is an extremely simple man, however, and honours and titles have little appeal for him; he has retired quietly to his estates in Quwait, to cultivate his beautiful gardens, perhaps to write a book of reminiscences, and to dream of the days when his will and personality alone kept the tribes in subjection. 648

I had the privilege of knowing the Khan Bahadur well, as I was a frequent guest at his house on Sharjah creek, and a great deal of my knowledge of the Arab mind and culture was derived from the long talks we had together. The descendant of a Saiyed, that is, one who claimed descent from Ali, the son-in-law of the Prophet Mohammed, he was educated at a university in India and took a degree in law. Entering the Indian Civil Service, he held several important appointments under the Indian Government and was eventually posted to Oman as British Residency Agent, a post to which his tact and gifts of diplomacy were well suited. Although himself a rich man, Abdur bin Razzak was always conscious of the primitive condition of the Arab tribes of Oman; he invariably took the side of the poor man, and fought strenuously against the tyranny of the sheikhs and the attempts of the rich merchants to victimize the peasantry. 115 185

He had nothing but contempt for the meanness and extravagance of the sheikhs, and was often driven to vitriolic outbursts of scorn at their neglect of their subjects. In truth I think there was much of the idealist and reformer in his make-up, for he had Utopian visions of an Arabia in which the desert was scientifically irrigated, so that the valleys not only flourished with thriving date plantations, but were green with wheat fields and vegetable crops. 185 311

185 Before he took his leave from Sharjah, he implored me to send
311 him some catalogues of British firms giving details of agricultural machinery, as he was determined to experiment on his estates at Quwait and prove to his own satisfaction that the desert could be made to bloom. His own gardens at the Sheikh's Wells were alone an object lesson in vegetable growing under difficult climatic and soil conditions, and I believe that if he had been given a free hand in Oman the Arab population could have been made self-supporting. He could never understand why the British authorities would give no assistance to agricultural development, and insisted in exporting from India, even during the critical period of the war when transport was one of our greatest problems, cereals and other foods which could have been cultivated locally.

134 It must not be imagined that the growing of cereals and vegetables is an easy matter in Arabia. In Oman nine-tenths of the surface is composed of sand which, under analysis, reveals a
312 remarkable proportion of salt and acids. Much of the land is at sea level, or even below it, so that the well-water is salt and brackish and unfit for plants. Yet in the higher ground there is no limit to the number of wells which may be dug, provided suitable machinery is available. The subterranean water supply is limitless, being replenished during the heavy rains by streams and torrents which rush down from the mountains. Artesian wells which were drilled by the R.A.F. at Sharjah proved to the satisfaction of the engineers that even in the low-lying areas water can be found at economical depths.

312 A properly-controlled irrigation system would be a costly
241 proposition at the outset, requiring extensive equipment and power units; but once it were installed, with a sufficiency of reservoirs to retain the supplies and modern pumping installations to ensure an adequate flow to canalized areas, one of the main difficulties of desert cultivation would have been overcome. Scientific treatment of the soil is another essential consideration, and from experiments which I undertook at Sharjah, with the advice of the Government of India's Agricultural Department in the Sind, I am confident that with proper treatment of the soil, both with chemicals and locally-produced manures, practically anything which grows in the sandy regions of northern India or Iraq, could be grown equally well in Oman.

241 In the small garden at the Fort I have grown cabbages and tomatoes as large and succulent as any which pass through Covent

Garden, whilst in the gardens at the Sheikh's Wells, I have seen 241 excellent radishes, beetroot, runner beans, onions, pumpkins, lettuce and several Indian varieties of vegetables. Pomegranates, figs and pomeloes, even melons, can be grown in suitable surroundings where there is sufficient shade, and in the mountain plains the Shi'hou tribes have cultivated wheat and barley for centuries. All this was achieved in a small area by means of systematic cultivation, proper treatment of the soil, and irrigation, and I see no reason why it cannot be similarly done throughout the Trucial Oman Coast, especially in the more fertile valleys and inland regions.

The effect of controlled agriculture would not only make the 511 Arabs of Oman practically self-supporting, but it would produce a fundamental change in their lives; the illiterate and emaciated peasantry, which at present lives a hand-to-mouth existence and is forced to spend a bare subsistence wage on buying food exported from India, at prices manipulated by the merchants, would be in a position to own smallholdings and sell their produce under some approved co-operative system. The Arab is an excellent farmer 241 and market-gardener, if he is given sufficient guidance and incentive, and, judging by the flourishing condition of the date plantations in Oman, I have little doubt that a scheme of general agriculture, if sponsored by the British Government, would enjoy equal success.

It is a dream of which one has scant hopes of fulfilment. Know- 000 ing the methods of the British Government in countries under mandate or protective control, it is extremely unlikely that anything will be done to improve the lot of the Arabs in Oman and make them economically secure. That our suzerainty imposes a great moral responsibility upon our shoulders does not seem to have smitten the official conscience, and the British public as a whole is so utterly ignorant of affairs in Arabia that it is not likely to concern itself with the plight of primitive tribes in Oman—a land of which eighty per cent of the population of the British Isles have most probably never heard. It is inconceivable that a government (and the word is not used in its political or party sense, but as indicative of the British Raj), which can allow its colonies in West Africa and other parts of the Empire to stagnate, withholding the financial aid which could make these territories flourishing and self-supporting centres of world trade, should exert itself on behalf of the Oman Arabs, particularly when there is little commercial advantage to be gained thereby.

It is unfortunate that this chapter should end on so pessimistic

000 a note, but I have discussed the affairs of Oman with various Government officials, and there was nothing to indicate from their attitude that the Arabs have any justification for hoping that Great Britain will aid their social and economic regeneration. She will continue to adopt a benevolent attitude, will supply them with erudite pamphlets on democracy prepared by the British Council, and will ensure that they are protected from famine; apart from this, and much charitable advice from her suave Political Officers, she will allow the Trucial Coast Arabs to retain their primitive, feudal existence as long as it suits her to control the Gulf.

Lest it be thought that I am moved by political interests to attack the British regime in Arabia, I wish to emphasize that I have no interest in politics apart from the prescriptive rights of a member of the electorate. As a friend and admirer of the Arab race, however, I feel strongly that we have taken undue advantage of these people and have unethically avoided our responsibilities towards them. My protest is written in the hope that it may evoke a sense of shame, and encourage at least some members of the Government or public to insist that an official investigation should be made into conditions in this territory.

648 There is much discontent in the Arab world, and everywhere
668 forces are at work, undermining British authority and attempting to foment rebellion against British rule. It would be pitiable if, after a hundred years of order and friendly relations with the Arabs of the Trucial Oman Coast, our lamentable policy of *laissez faire* and indifference should ultimately estrange this race and give rise to forces of reaction which might undo the admirable work of our pioneers and administrators.

# CHAPTER VII

WITH the onset of Spring the rains had entirely ceased and, apart/32 from occasional dust-storms and gales, the weather was ideal for flying purposes. Dust-storms were not frequent on the Trucial Oman Coast, but when they did occur they gave us considerable trouble and caused fairly long delays in the services. We were in the centre of a vast belt of sandy desert, extending from North Africa in the west to the Sind in the east, and anywhere within this region sand- and dust-storms were to be expected in the spring and summer months. Their origin seems to be similar to that of a whirlpool or typhoon; masses of hot air rise in spiral directions, creating a vacuum in the centre. The radius of these spirals may vary from a few feet to several hundred yards, and they suck the top layers of sand high into the air, where it remains suspended for hours; a gale often follows, and several miles of desert may be darkened by clouds of sand.

A severe sand-storm resembles a London fog of the 'pea soup' variety. Visibility is limited to a few yards; sand gets in one's eyes, nose and mouth, and beneath one's clothes; it creeps under tightly-shut doors and through closed windows; it penetrates into food cupboards and refrigerators and, more serious still, sometimes gets into aero engines and cylinders. Aircraft will never attempt to fly through a sand-storm and can easily climb above one, but pilots refuse to land in such conditions. This often means a delay of hours or even days, expecially when more than one airfield on the route is similarly affected.

With the Ensign aircraft which were then in use between Cairo 000 and Karachi, it was customary for planes to land at both Sharjah and Jiwani, on the Baluchistan coast, to re-fuel. Since both places were subject to corresponding meteorological conditions, both frequently suffered from sand-storms at the same time; the result was that aircraft were unable to over-fly Sharjah and land at Jiwani, as was done during the heavy rains, but had to wait at Bahrain until conditions improved.

To-day, with fewer stops for aircraft, they are able to reach their

000 objectives on schedule, flying high above adverse weather or dust-storms. For example, the York and Lancastrian services have one stop only between England and India—Lydda, the Palestine airport—and can complete the trip in eighteen hours' flying time. At present the old route is traversed by Dakota aircraft, which are obliged to re-fuel at Shaiba and Sharjah, but in the future, when larger and more powerfully-engined aircraft such as the York and Tudor types operate a regular service to the Far East, places like Sharjah and Jiwani will become obsolete.

652 The Sheikh of Sharjah derives a large proportion of his income
508 from rentals in connexion with the R.A.F. and civil air services. The rental for the camp and airport is considerable, but in addition to this he receives five rupees for each landing. During my stay at Sharjah the average number of landings per week, including R.A.F., American A.T.C., and British Overseas Airways, totalled about seventy in good weather, which represents a weekly income of £27 at the present rate of exchange. The sheikh is naturally anxious about the future, and whenever he called at the Fort or I visited his palace, he would enquire if I thought Sharjah would be retained as an air base. If a copy of this book ever reaches him, he will know by that time what the prospects are likely to be.

508 My own guess is that, so far as civil air-lines are concerned, Sharjah airfield will be used in the future only as an emergency landing ground. The modern trend in air services is for long-distance aircraft with one, or at the most two, stopping points, so that it is extremely unlikely that large passenger-carrying planes will land at Sharjah under normal conditions. From the operational point of view, the airfield is not suitable for present-day conditions. When it was first constructed, fifteen or more years ago, it was perfectly suitable for the D.H. 42's and other aircraft which pioneered the route, but times, and aircraft, have changed. The surface is very soft in parts, moreover, and rolling does not improve it; during the rains the sub-soil becomes boggy and clayish, and high-pressure tyres have been known to cut it up so severely as to put the airfield out of action for several weeks. It is below sea-level and becomes easily water-logged, is situated in an area subject to bad dust-storms and gales, and, due to the presence of high sandhills at one end and a creek at the other, extension of the runways beyond 2,000 yards is impracticable.

The airfield at Sharjah has been under review by the Air Ministry for several years, and at one time it was planned to lay

down metal strips or even to construct a concrete surface. The 508
advice of the Public Works Department was sought; they advised the Government that, since the ground was below sea-level and contained a veritable lake ten feet below the surface, the project would require an expensive pumping installation which, together with the materials, which would have to be imported from England, plus the skilled labour required, would cost not less than £1,000,000. The Air Ministry, looking for once into the future, and realizing that with new types of aircraft Sharjah might lose some of its former importance and usefulness, quickly decided that they would take no action. Thus, if the Sheikh of Sharjah or any of the Oman financiers imagine that the airfield is likely to become a 'Heath Row' of the East, they had better think again.

It is, of course, impossible to prophecy accurately the future of anything, but judging by present-day trends in aviation I do not think it is unduly pessimistic to foretell a day, perhaps in five or ten years' time, when Sharjah will be virtually closed down as a civil airport. I do believe it is likely, however, that it may be used by smaller aircraft, such as Dragon Rapides or Dominies and Lockheed types, which may operate shuttle services between bases on
the Gulf. There is a tremendous trade in pearls and piece-goods 439
between Arabia, Iraq and India, and time is an important factor in
business to-day in the East. The modern Indian or Arab business 509
man prefers to travel by plane, and I am confident that an internal air-line between Cairo and Karachi, stopping at Lydda, Baghdad, Basrah, Bahrain and Sharjah *en route*, would have a steady and growing demand. If such an air-line is not operated by British Overseas Airways, then it is fairly certain that an Indian civil air organization will obtain permission to operate one.

The American air authorities are extremely anxious to operate 508
air-lines on this route, over which they have been flying military 509
planes since 1942, and there is little doubt that they would welcome the opportunity of running short feeder services between Baghdad and Karachi, via Sharjah, if the British Government decided not to continue operating on this route. The Americans, who were represented at Sharjah by a unit of Air Transport Command, had an efficient air-line organization at Sharjah in 1945. It was built almost entirely by the Air Ministry Public Works Department, and the erection of buildings and hangars had priority over the R.A.F. and B.O.A.C. Flying Control management was shared by the A.T.C. and the R.A.F., whilst the Americans had their own

508 extremely accurate meteorological service. They were indepen-
509 dent for water supply and electric power, and their organization
from every point of view was impressively efficient. A considerable number of their pilots, ground staff and administrative officers and engineers were former employees of Pan-American Airways and American Export Lines.

From conversation I had with some of the senior American officers, it was perfectly clear that they anticipated no difficulties in operating civil air-lines on this route after the war. It was true that the buildings and installations had been erected by British labour, and not by themselves (a condition necessitated by the treaty with the Trucial Oman sheikhs, whereby foreign nations were prohibited from acquiring political or commercial interests in the territory), but the American viewpoint seemed to be: 'we have expended millions of dollars in operating an efficient war machine in the Persian Gulf, and thus helping you to win the fight in Burma. It is only right that we should be allowed to run a civil air-line on this route in peace-time, especially if you do not want to use it.'

000 Whatever the rights of the case may be, there can be little doubt that, at the present stage of British aircraft development, American air-lines such as Pan-American would soon, from the commercial point of view, 'drive us out of the air' if they operated on this route; against their larger, faster, and more efficiently run planes, we should be left standing and British prestige in India and the Middle East would suffer a serious set-back.

Commercially and strategically, the Persian Gulf has always been one of our life-lines; progress in aviation has not lessened its importance. It is essential for us to maintain an air-line between India and the Middle East, even if it be merely a token service, and the purpose of this could be achieved economically by the operation of internal feeder lines to cope with passengers and freight. If the British Government has the foresight to undertake such a service, Sharjah and the other small intermediary bases will continue to be used for many years.

Regarded from the angle of military strategy alone the Persian Gulf area will continue to dominate the scene of international politics for many years. For one thing, it is in the middle of our vital sea-lines to India, dividing Asia from the Middle East and West, and provides harbours, anchorages and re-fuelling ports which are essential in war-time. The country which has full armed control of the Trucial Oman Coast, which it could use as the main

Eastern base of a powerful air fleet, could command Arabia, Iraq, 000
Persia and Africa; it could completely cut off the sea and air routes to India and South Africa, and could effectively close the Suez Canal. A belligerent foreign power which held Oman and the Persian Gulf could completely seal-off British influence south of the Mediterranean.

For this reason I think it is highly probable that the Air Ministry will retain Sharjah and the other R.A.F. bases in the Persian Gulf and use them not only as staging posts and re-fuelling points, but as permanent stations of Fighter or Bomber Command.

The political future of the Persian Gulf depends to a great 648
extent on the British Government's policy. There is little doubt that the ruler of Saudi Arabia has no wish to extend his influence so far south. King Ibn Saud is content with his vast desert territories, many of which are rich in oil deposits which are being exploited to his advantage by international combines. It is said that his writ runs throughout the Arabian desert, but the Trucial sheikhs owe him no allegiance and, whilst according him great respect as a powerful leader, would resist any encroachment on their territory. British suzerainty, with all the financial tit-bits accruing to it, suits them admirably.

Russia has certain interests in southern Persia and the Gulf, and is anxious to develop the oil deposits in this region, but she is unlikely to extend her sphere of influence to Arabia; it is true that she would like to have a sea exit to the Persian Gulf, a valuable waterway with all India and the East as its goal, but her aims in the Middle East have never been published and it would be injudicious to hazard a guess about them.

A new importance was given to the Middle East by the discovery 000
of oil. The word 'discovery' is perhaps not strictly accurate, since petroleum deposits were known to the Babylonians and the ancient inhabitants of Persia and Iraq. Natural gas was used for domestic purposes and perhaps worshipped by the Mithradites and Sumerians, whose principal god was the sun and fire. The Bible story of the 'burning bush' which Moses commanded, was probably based on an incident explainable to science, such as the ignition of an escape of petroleum gas. The priests of those days were skilled in utilizing phenomena of this sort for the performance of ritual magic, thus impressing the superstitious and ignorant masses.

000 Petroleum in the Middle East was not developed on a commercial scale until the twentieth century, culminating in that vast project of modern engineering, the construction and installation of the Haifa pipe-line. During the past ten years the industry has made rapid strides; pipe-lines have been laid throughout Iraq and part of Arabia; a city of pipes, girders and refineries has sprung up at Abadan, at the extreme northern point of the Persian Gulf, and thousands of drillers, engineers, prospectors, technicians and workmen have been employed in the oil fields by the great international oil companies. Geologists have mapped huge areas of desert and mountain on both sides of the Gulf, by air as well as on foot, and from their conclusions it is reasonable to believe that almost inexhaustible subterranean supplies of oil flow in lakes of varying depth from Mosul, straight down the Persian Gulf, and probably along the coast of southern Persia as far east as Baluchistan.

Until the internal combustion or jet propulsion engine is replaced by atomic energy, oil is likely to remain a major factor in world power politics, and the territories in which the principal deposits lie will be sought after by interested nations. Thus the future of Arabia, an important oil-producing country, may be utterly changed in the next fifty years by the needs of modern industry. So far, the American countries have confined their activities to Arabia proper and the island of Bahrain, which, our own experts stated, after drilling experiments, contained insufficient deposits to warrant exploitation; not long afterwards American drillers found oil a short distance out at sea, estimated to be of sufficient quantity to yield a million barrels a year, and obtained a concession to work it.

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471 The same thing may happen in the Trucial Oman Coast, unless we are wide-awake enough to develop the resources of that region ourselves. A geologist employed by the Anglo-Persian Company assured me that large deposits of high-grade petroleum lie under the sands between Sharjah and Ras-al-Khaimah; American drillers who sank wells for water, but who by a remarkable coincidence found oil, have proved it. A number of British oil companies, who have joint financial interests, have obtained concessions from the Trucial sheikhs, and it is to be hoped that as soon as economic and other conditions allow, they will undertake drilling operations in this region.

•000 The search for oil is going to change the face of Arabia, but if it results in modernizing the desert tribes and introducing the benefits of civilization to Oman and other backward regions, even the romanticist must forbear from complaint. It would be ironical if commercial enterprize, with no aim other than that of making money, succeeded in initiating the reforms and social changes which the British Government has been reluctant or unwilling to introduce.

A general review of the Middle Eastern oil situation, based on figures published by the American Petroleum Institute, reveals the astonishing fact that under the desert there lies a reservoir of oil which could keep the world supplied on a basis of pre-war requirements for many years. The proved reserves of the Persian Gulf area, as a whole, are estimated at about sixteen billion barrels, as compared with United States proved reserves of about twenty billions. The proved reserves of Iran appear to be about five to six billion barrels, those of Iraq and Kuwait about four billions each, Saudi Arabia two billions and Qatar less than one-half billion. 'Proved' means known reserves, but it is only fair to say that some experts believe reserves in this area will greatly exceed these amounts.

All of the important oil fields and practically all of the desirable prospective oil territory in the Middle East are held by four groups of companies:

1. Those of Iran are held by the Anglo-Iranian Oil Co., Ltd., in which the British Government owns a majority of the common shares.

2. The fields of Iraq and Qatar, as well as important concessions in Syria, Palestine and the Trucial Oman Coast, are held by the Iraq Petroleum Company, Ltd., and associated companies. Ninety-five per cent of the Iraq Petroleum Company, Ltd., is owned one quarter each by Anglo-Iranian, the Royal Dutch-Shell Group, a French group, and the Near East Development Corporation, which is owned jointly by two American companies: the Standard Oil Company of New Jersey and Socony-Vacuum.

3. The oil fields of Saudi Arabia and Bahrain are held by companies owned on a fifty-fifty basis by the Standard Oil Company of California, and the Texas Company through the Arabian-American Oil Company.

4. The Kuwait concession is possessed, fifty per cent each, by Anglo-Iranian and by the Gulf Exploration Company, a subsidiary of the Gulf Oil Corporation of the United States.

Accordingly, of the four groups which possess the oil rights in this area, Anglo-Iranian owns the entire Iran concession, one-half of Kuwait, and one-fourth of Iraq. British interests are further represented by the Royal Dutch-Shell Group.

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The oil fields of Kuwait are shut in at this time. From the fields of Saudi Arabia and Bahrain there are now being produced about 35,000 barrels per day; but out of the British-owned fields of Iran there is now a net daily withdrawal of about 275,000 barrels. The fields of Iraq are producing about 90,000 per day. The Iran fields are connected by pipe-line with the Anglo-Iranian refinery at tide-water at Abadan, at the northern end of the Persian Gulf. The Kirkuk field, in Iraq, is connected with the eastern Mediterranean seaboard by a pipe-line system with terminals in Haifa, Palestine and Tripoli.

There are three important refineries in the area. The largest —in fact, the largest in the world—is the Anglo-Iranian refinery at Abadan. The second is at Haifa, owned jointly by Anglo-Iranian and the Royal Dutch-Shell Group; this refinery processes the crude oil from Iraq. The third is situated in Bahrain Island, and is owned jointly by the Standard Oil Company of California and the Texas Company. In 1944 the U.S. Petroleum Administration for War approved the construction of a refinery in Saudi Arabia with a capacity of 50,000 barrels per day. This refinery is to be entirely financed and owned by the Standard Oil Company of California and the Texas Company.

The Abadan refinery has a daily production figure of some 280,000 barrels. In 1944 the U.S. Government, through the office of the Petroleum Administrator, approved the allocation of materials for another short pipe-line in Iran to Abadan. When it is completed in the near future, an additional 40,000 barrels of crude oil will flow daily to the Abadan refinery. An application is also pending on behalf of the Iraq Petroleum Corporation for materials to build a twenty or twenty-four-inch pipe-line from Iraq to Haifa. This would mean a daily movement of crude oil in the amount of about 80,000 barrels a day. Material priorities for the building of this pipe-line have not yet been granted.

The concession to the Arabian-American Oil Company has approximately fifty years' grace; that to the Gulf Exploration Company has about sixty years to run. Oil in the ground that is not yet being extracted, refined and marketed, so as to yield royalties, is not worth much to the owners or concessionaires. King Ibn Saud of Saudi Arabia and the Sheikh of Kuwait want revenues, not only to maintain their governments, but to advance their countries economically and socially. They want these royalties in satisfactory volume as quickly as possible. If the concessionaires do not take steps soon to increase the flow of royalties, the king and the sheikh, acting independently or in concert, will probably look for someone else to produce and market their oil.

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The petrol 'war' which a few years ago was threatening between the United States and Great Britain, over the vexed question of oil supplies in Arabia and the Middle East, was settled by the respective oil companies in August, 1944. The American viewpoint, according to Mr. Harold Ickes, then U.S. Secretary of the Interior and Petroleum Administrator, was that the interests of the American nation must be protected, 'so as to assure a large reserve of oil to the U.S.A. in the event of our reserves continuing to dwindle. It was thought that, as a matter of common sense and for the protection of the country (by guaranteeing supplies to the Army and Navy) we ought to have oil reserves in different *strategic* parts of the world if we are going to live, as we must, as a part of the new world that is already taking shape'.

It was proposed that the U.S. Government should build, own and operate a pipe-line with extensions into both Saudi Arabia and Kuwait, with an outlet on the Mediterranean to convey crude oil. This pipe-line would extend for approximately 1,250 miles and would cost between 125 and 165 million dollars. The project aroused considerable opposition in the United States, principally on account of the expense, but also because it committed the country to foreign territorial liabilities of the kind which make Isolationists shudder. Some said it was a possible breeder of future wars; others said it was the Fascist approach. The matter aroused no less interest and speculation in London. If the United States were going ahead to build and operate a pipe-line in an area where Great Britain also had important interests, it became obvious that these two friendly powers should promptly commence to 'talk oil' on a world-wide basis. After all, the proposed pipe-line was a project which could naturally affect British interests in the Middle East. As matters stood, the British pipe-line from the Iran fields to Haifa and Tripoli constituted the only outlets to the eastern shore of the Mediterranean. The proposed American pipe-line would offer an outlet for competitive oil.

After a delay of several months, the British Cabinet sent a delegation to Washington, headed by Lord Beaverbrook, and in August, 1944, agreement was reached between the two countries regarding the pooling of petroleum resources in Iraq, Iran and

000 Arabia. The British Government, under this agreement, consented to remove restrictive measures limiting the right to search for oil within what roughly constituted the boundaries of the old Ottoman Empire. The United States would have the same freedom to explore for and develop oil in lands under British control as Great Britain has always had in American territory.

It is probable that, in due course, either the American interests will build a pipe-line side by side with a British pipe-line, or a common pipe-line may be constructed with laterals extending into Iran, Iraq, Arabia and Kuwait. What is of the utmost importance, from the political and economic point of view, is that Arabia, when fully exploited, is liable to become one of the richest countries in the world. To quote from a report from Dr. E. De Golyer, chairman of a commission of U.S. geologists which flew over the whole of the Middle East oilfields in November, 1943, 'the oil that can be ultimately extracted from this area will probably exceed the wildest dreams of to-day'.

Whether, now that the war and the economic alliance between Great Britain and America are both ended, these oil agreements will be put into effect and American capital and machinery will flow into Arabia, is a moot point. The termination of Lease-Lend and the chariness of the United States to grant loans or economic assistance to her old ally, may compel British industry to develop its own resources at the expense of international co-operation. Whatever the outcome may be, it is of vital interest to the Arabs that they should receive cultural and social, as well as financial, benefits from oil exploitation in their country. If royalties are merely going into the pockets of feudal-minded sheikhs in order to increase their petty power and extravagance, then the development of oil in Arabia will do more injury to the Arab cause than the indifference of successive British governments has engendered.

# CHAPTER VIII

THERE was a considerable amount of sickness in the R.A.F. camp at this time and the hospital was full with several cases of malaria and dysentery. In spite of the heat, with an average daily temperature of 110° F., there were still a number of stagnant pools in the desert, the remnants of the floods. Stringent anti-malarial measures were taken by Squadron-Leader Cranley, and enforced by the Medical Officer, Flight-Lieutenant Cargill, and squads of men equipped with drums of oil were detailed to spray all puddles and receptacles holding water. The men were also obliged to wear trousers and long-sleeved shirts after dusk, and realistic propaganda films depicting the dangers caused to health by not taking proper precautions against flies and mosquitoes, were shown at the open-air cinema.

It was believed that the main source of infection was the poorer part of Sharjah Town, especially the jumble of verminous huts outside the walls. Water and other liquids were often left lying about in the open by the Arabs, and on analysis the contents were found to contain anopheles larvæ. It is also fairly certain, in spite of statements to the contrary, that mosquitoes will breed in brackish or even salt water, and larvæ were on occasion found in the creek at low tide. Permission was obtained from the sheikh for anti-malarial parties to visit houses in the town and spray the rooms with pyretheum. These visits were highly unpopular with the inhabitants, who resented the intrusion of infidels into the privacy of their homes, but there is no doubt that it was effective in reducing outbreaks of malarial disease.

Due largely to the strict precautions taken by the medical authorities, and the daily dose of quinine or mepicrine taken by each man in the camp, malarial outbreaks at no time exceeded one per cent of personnel. There were no deaths from malaria during my stay at Sharjah, and only five malignant cases occurred and had to be transferred to the hospital at Bahrain by air for special treatment. Dysentery—which was probably caused by food being contaminated by flies—and similar stomach disorders were fairly

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common, as was sand-fly fever, and a curious illness of two or three days' duration in which the patient's temperature sometimes rose to 104°. The doctors were never able to classify this illness, and the American medical officer attributed it to psychological causes.

The health of my own staff at the Fort was remarkably good; apart from the usual summer complaints such as prickly-heat, boils, heat stroke and minor stomach ailments, there was only one case of suspected malaria, the victim being an Indian storekeeper. Prickly-heat, which is caused by excessive perspiration blocking up the pores of the skin, can be an extremely painful complaint. Those with the most sensitive skins suffer the most, and are often in great agony, red and inflamed weals forming on various parts of their bodies. The only preventive seems to be to tan the skin thoroughly in the sun, thereby toughening the pores, and to drink plenty of fresh water and lime drinks. Bathing and the wearing of light, open clothing are also helpful, as are plenty of exercise and the avoidance of alcohol. Yet, in spite of these precautions, there is no guarantee that anyone resident in the Persian Gulf during the summer months will escape the agonies of prickly-heat.

In some rooms in the Fort air-condition units have been installed, and these do enable one to enjoy a night's rest in comparative comfort. The disadvantage of this system is that one feels the heat and humidity twice as much when returning to the outside air. Most members of my staff preferred to sleep on the roof of the Fort, despite the fact that in the morning their blankets would be soaked with dew. The R.A.F. camp had several 'coolers', brick buildings in which ice-cooled air was circulated by means of electric fans, but the policy now is to install air-conditioning in all the sleeping and living quarters.

To readers of Doughty and Colonel Lawrence this pandering to modern comforts in the desert may come as a shock; for some reason or other anyone who goes to Arabia is supposed to endure all the discomforts of tropical life and like it. To those who are of this mind I would suggest a prolonged visit to the Trucial Oman Coast during the summer; next to Death Valley in California it is reputed to have one of the worst climates in the world. There is no doubt that men like Doughty and Lawrence did endure considerable privations and discomforts; but the latter was a soldier engaged in one of the bitterest minor battles of the 1914-18 war, and what he went through, in his light and cool Arab dress, was experienced by khaki-clad troops in the Middle East in 1917 as well as in 1942. Further, the conditions of extreme heat and humidity which are found in the Persian Gulf districts do not obtain in Trans-Jordan, Iraq or Palestine, where the terrain is more mountainous and fertile.

DOD

The European staff seldom did a tour of duty in the Gulf exceeding eighteen months, as this was considered to be the maximum period consistent with good health. Some could not stand even as long as this and, even if their physical health had not broken down, they became mentally afflicted and went 'round the bend'. The symptoms of this affliction are extreme pessimism about life in general, loss of appetite, a penchant for excessive drinking, loss of memory, and the liability to unreasoned fits of temper over the slightest thing. The only remedy is to return the patient without delay to England or, if this is impracticable, send him on leave to a hill station in India. Once in a cool climate, away from the desert and its monotony, he will quickly recover. Unfortunately, men in this condition have sometimes been retained at their posts even after they have developed these symptoms; if this occurs there is a danger that the affliction may become permanent.

Health in the desert, apart from the normal precautions one may take, is largely a matter of temperament. Some men find a deep inner enjoyment in living in lonely places, and occupy their minds by taking a creative interest in the country, the people and their language, and the flora and fauna. People of this type rarely suffer a breakdown and even a long stay seems to do them no harm. There are men employed by the oil companies in the Gulf who have spent years in the region, with brief spells of leave in England, and nothing would induce them to exchange desert life for the more comfortable conditions of twentieth-century existence, with its cafés, theatres and cinemas. To others the mere sight of the desert is anathema and they quickly tire of the strange sights and the romance provided by the Arabian mode of life. They detest the sun and the heat, complain of the food and the discomfort and try to maintain exactly the same sort of life they enjoyed in suburbia. Behaving as they would on holiday at Brighton, they expose themselves to the dangerous tropical sun, drink far more than is good for them even in a European climate and, when they begin to feel unwell, sink into an incurable melancholia for which the only cure is a ship home.

Fortunately such men are rare in the Persian Gulf, where only the best types are needed, and where the Englishman still enjoys a high reputation among the Arabs for hard work, honesty, common sense and good living. It was remarkable that among the hundreds of R.A.F. men who were stationed at Sharjah, many of whom came from industrial towns and had never been overseas before, only a handful failed to adjust themselves to their strange surroundings and carry on the fine traditions of their race. Many had families at home and had come out rather grudgingly, but after a few weeks they settled down, with the typical good humour of the British soldier or airman, and got to love their desert life as though it were some great adventure—as it was. The Arabs liked and respected them, and always came in crowds to watch a sports meeting or an inter-service football match. The camp life was well organized and much importance was given to outdoor activities. Drill was not included in the routine, much to the chagrin of a certain sergeant, but there were voluntary exhibitions of recreational P.T., cricket played on matting strips, soccer and rugby games, and daily trips to the sea for bathing and surf-riding.

On most evenings during the week there was an open-air cinema. The projector was not entirely satisfactory, and a breakdown occurred at nearly every performance, whilst the sound effects were blurred and harsh, but no one seemed to mind and hoots and cat-calls left the patient operator unperturbed. Sand-flies and sand-storms were another disturbing element, and at times these were so severe as to put an end to the performance. It was a curious experience to sit in a canvas enclosure in the middle of the desert, with the stars gleaming overhead and one's feet resting on the soft sand, and hear Bing Crosby crooning to an exotic blonde.

The sight of an European woman was a rarity. When one did pay a visit to Sharjah she probably received more flattering attention than at any other time in her life. Members of the U.S. nursing service occasionally came to the camp by special aircraft, but they were quickly whisked off to the American mess and one saw little of them. Female passengers came to the Fort while the aircraft re-fuelled; they were usually Government officials, nursing sisters, or members of the W.A.A.F. or A.T.S. travelling on duty. Night-stops were comparatively few, and women passengers were accommodated in a special part of the Fort, where they had their own bathrooms and toilets.

We adapted ourselves to our environment in accordance with our temperaments and circumstances, but no natural man can prevent himself, in whatever spot on earth chance may place him, from clinging to the familiar things which form his background. 000 Thus Lawrence, who could live content on dates and honey with no company but that of simple Bedouins, resorted when on service in India to his portable gramophone and played records of the great composers' music, rather than listen enchanted to the monotonous, reedy chant of a hillsman's pipe.

I suppose that segregation from one's womenfolk is one of the hardest privations men have to endure in the desert. The men must have missed their wives and sweethearts, and felt depressed at times by the lonely silence of the desert, when nights are hot and disturbed, and the very stars have a cold, hard glitter. Enforced continence was accepted as a matter of course by the old travellers; at least, one assumes so, for they never seem to mention the matter in their books. This may have been due to old-fashioned delicacy, but I consider that deep thinking and the zeal for exploration had sublimated the normal sex instincts. Their books are scholarly and often restrained and factual in style, so that one rarely has a glimpse of the author's true character or inner thoughts. There is seldom a reference to the most commonplace of biological facts, and one feels that, beneath the bushy beards and thick-lensed sun-glasses, there bubbled a veritable volcano of repressions.

There is no doubt that the man who decides to spend part of his life in the desert must be prepared to overcome normal desires by sublimating them in some way. Work is the most effective / antidote, combined with an undiminishing interest in the people of the country, their customs and manners. When one is concerned with other people one begins to forget oneself. The weak man who transgresses the laws of Christian and Mohammedan, and violates the harem or indulges in licentious practices lays up a great store of trouble for himself. He will incur the wrath and contempt of the Arabs, the hostility of his own associates, and may easily contract one of the many terrible diseases of the desert. Gonorrhœa, syphillis, smallpox and leprosy may be the harsh rewards of illicit adventures with the Jezebels of the desert.

The women of respectable Arab families are as remote and 562 untouchable as an Indian prince's bride; prisoners of the harem, 565 they are seldom seen in public, and then only in the company of their husbands and retainers, and deeply veiled. The peasant women one sees at all times of the day; they are timid, ragged creatures, about as sweet-smelling as a Malayan durian. They 514 perform their toilet on the shores of the nearest creek, squatting

514 like black crows as, without a vestige of matronly shame, they relieve themselves. He who would pursue one of these would be a brave and a needy man, in all conscience.

000 In Saudi Arabia and Iraq, the women are much fairer in colouring and altogether more civilized by Western standards, especially among the merchant and middle classes: although in Iraq one also finds one of the most primitive peoples in the world, the fierce Marsh Arabs, who live in stilted huts in the middle of a swamp. In Baghdad or Basrah you may find female beauty to vie with Cleopatra's, whilst among the Bedouins I have seen girls of regal
142 countenance and poise. Among the women of the Oman tribes,
however, the features are simian rather than Semitic, although
here and there one sees a dark-eyed beauty with a smooth copper
skin and slim ankles. Their make-up would give Elizabeth Arden
302 a few ideas and probably a heart attack. Belladonna and the dye obtained from a desert shrub is poured into the eyes to make them unnaturally bright and large, and the lashes are painted with a dark blue liquid. Lips and the inside of their hands are also stained with henna or some red dye, and the hair is oiled and screwed tightly back from the head.

000 Europeans have not infrequently married into Arab families, but the women usually came from Bedouin or northern tribes and were fairly civilized. One old man I know, who originally came from Liverpool, married a Syrian woman and had several fine sons by her. At one time a sailor on the old sailing ships, he went to America for several years, later voyaging to Arabia, where he joined a band of Bedouins and remained with them in the desert for several years. I have heard that he even took part in their expeditions. They accepted him as one of themselves and, burned by the desert sun, he came to look more like an Arab than an Englishman. Eventually he discarded Western life and associations altogether, embraced the Islamic faith, and made the pilgrimage to Mecca. 'Haji' Williamson, now a respectable member of the Bahrain community, is a well-known character in the Gulf.

My duties as Manager were fairly simple ones, requiring more alertness of mind and tact in liaising with my neighbours than concentrated effort. Office routine became a habit, easy to one who had undertaken the duties of adjutant and administrative officer in the R.A.F., and in preparing my correspondence and monthly reports to headquarters I was assisted by an efficient and very intelligent Indian secretary. The main task was to ensure that aircraft were provided with every facility, operational, technical and domestic, and my responsibility began with their departure from the base and ended with their arrival at their destination. Accuracy and speedy delivery of weather reports, decisions regarding the state of the runways, checking up of engine maintenance and refuelling routine, ensuring that the load (that is, passengers and freight) is correctly adjusted, and superintending the feeding and comforts of passengers and crew, are an essential part of a Station Manager's duties. They are his personal responsibility, although the actual work is undertaken by individual members of his staff; the engineers, the catering officer, the senior traffic officer, the meteorologists, and by the minor officials who work under them. 000

In addition to the purely operational tasks, there were innumerable duties connected with life at the Fort. Alterations to the building were in progress, and new staff quarters for the Indians were being added to the old wing; plans had to be approved by headquarters, costs had to be agreed between the Corporation accountants and the Public Works Department, and daily consultations were necessary with the resident engineer in connexion with building materials, equipment and labour difficulties.

Owing to the inferior nature of local building materials and the effect of the climate, the Fort had to be redecorated at frequent intervals, the interior required re-painting, and, occasionally, minor structural alterations were needed; furniture had to be renewed or repaired; food stocks and engineering stores had to be constantly checked and replenished; a careful check had to be kept on the water supply, the plumbing system required frequent attention, and the power-house, workshops, stores and kitchens had to be inspected daily.

The Fort was a self-contained unit apart from its water supply, which was obtained from the R.A.F. by gravitation flow from the Sheikh's Wells reservoir two miles distant and thence pumped to various parts of the camp. With the exception of rice, ghee butter (used by the Indians for their cooking) and fish, which were purchased in the local market, food supplies had to be imported by air from India. It was an expensive method, but it enabled us to have fresh supplies of vegetables, meat and fruit, and our standard of living was extremely high.

Apart from locally-engaged Arabs, who were employed as cleaners, workmen and coolies, ninety per cent of the staff consisted of Indians. They belonged to various religious sects, the Hindus

000 and Moslems predominating, and it required no little tact to maintain a harmonious atmosphere. Fortunately, no friction of a serious kind occurred, although there were numerous squabbles of a minor nature. Accommodation in the Fort being strictly limited, it was necessary to put two or three Indians in one room, and one had to be extremely careful that men of differing sects or castes were not thrown together.

Indians do not possess a very high communal sense, and their ideas of democracy do not accord with ours; thus, whilst they are always anxious to assert their equality with the European and demand to share his privileges, they have no equality among themselves. Food was another difficulty; the Moslem will not eat the food of the Hindu, and requires it to be cooked in a special way. This problem was solved by separating them into two messes, but even this gave rise to trouble, because senior Indian members of the staff who happened to belong to a certain sect were obliged to dine in the junior mess.

A great deal of my time each week was spent in receiving deputations of Indians and Persians, listening to their petty complaints, and in settling disputes. Most of these were childish in the extreme, but if a serious antagonism developed the only remedy was to return one or both of the disputants to India. One hesitated to do this too often; the replacement of staff was not easy, passages in aircraft were hard to obtain, and one's superiors were apt to regard such action as reflecting on the ability to handle staff.

Sport provided our best safety-valve. The Indians were extremely keen on cricket, football and hockey, which they played in their bare feet, and in recreation they forgot all their personal troubles and even overlooked social and religious differences. Every effort was made to make them happy and comfortable, for we realized that they felt their exile much more keenly than did the Europeans, who were more adaptable and better organized as a community. Table tennis, darts and other indoor games were encouraged in their mess, and occasionally Indian talkie films were specially despatched from Karachi for their benefit. The only serious disturbance we had was due to two men, both Eurasians and senior members of the staff, who were very heavy drinkers. Whisky and gin were not obtainable at the Fort, except on rare occasions, or for the entertainment of passengers and guests, so these two men secretly built a crude still and manufactured arrack from dates and barley.

It took me several weeks to discover their secret. Complaints DOD had been received from the sheikh that members of our staff and of a local oil company had been seen in Sharjah at night in a drunken condition, and had molested Arab women. On one occasion an employee was badly beaten up by some Arabs, and on investigation [illegible] transpired that he and some others had wandered into a [illegible] house and insulted the inhabitants. The matter became [illegible] serious when Indian clerks, who had hitherto been noted for their irreproachable behaviour, began to get noisily drunk.

One morning, during my tour of inspection, I chanced to enter a small lean-to building behind the carpenter's shop. It had been locked for nearly two years, and contained a distillation plant which had not been used for a long time; the P.W.D. wished to dismantle the machinery and I wanted to see it before it was taken away. In a dark recess behind the boiler I found a small arrack still, consisting of a crude retort made out of an empty oil drum, and another drum containing the fermented juice of dates. On the ground were several bottles full of a filthy concoction which proved to be arrack. An immediate enquiry was held, in which I was assisted by the R.A.F. Provost's department, and after lengthy interrogation, the instigators confessed to their crime. On receiving their promise not to repeat the offence I decided not to report the matter to headquarters, and the incident was forgotten.

The still was destroyed, all members of the staff were forbidden to visit Sharjah after dusk, and there was no further insobriety in the Fort. A month later, when supplies of alcohol were received from Karachi, it was found possible to issue the Indian staff with a ration of gin.

Contact with the outside world was confined to half an hour's chat with passengers whilst the aircraft re-fuelled; they were mostly naval or military officers *en route* to India. The Maharajahs of Jodpur and Patiala visited the Fort, as did the Afghan Minister to Iraq, Captain the Hon. Gordon-Lennox (an old friend who was at G.H.Q. with me in France in 1940), Mr. Casey, British Minister to Bengal; Sir Christopher Courtenay, Air Chief Marshal, Supplies and Organization; the Inspector-General of the R.A.F., Sir Ludlow Hewitt (who found fault with our latrines); Sir Charles Cochrane, A.O.C., Middle East, and his aide, Air Commodore Whitney-Straight, and several members of the Cabinet who were on a tour of the Burma theatre.

Most of our visitors were impressed by the efficient organization

OD provided by the Fort, situated as it was in the middle of an inhospitable desert. If, owing to a night-stop, they were obliged to spend a day or two at the Fort, we did our best to entertain them, either by taking them on bathing parties or on conducted tours of the native quarter, and they often confessed that their visit to Sharjah was one of the highlights of the journey.

In the spring of 1945 we were advised that Field-Marshal Lord Wavell and his staff, who was on his way to England by Sunderland flying-boat, might land at Dubai for a few hours. For two days we stood-by with a guard of honour at the miniature jetty awaiting the boat's arrival; on the second afternoon, grilled and discomforted by the sun, we received a signal informing us that his lordship had overflown Dubai and was landing at Bahrain. I heard afterwards that the meal which my confrère at Bahrain, Tony Welch, provided for the Viceregal party strained his resources to the utmost, and that the staff went on short rations for two weeks following the visit.

Our Askhari guards formed a picturesque piece of showmanship which never failed to impress visitors. When an aircraft landed they were provided with long garments of terra-cotta coloured linen, shaped like the old-fashioned nightshirt, which they pulled over their own ragged clothes. With brightly burnished rifles and gleaming daggers, they would form up proudly on each side of the gateway and made a most imposing spectacle of ruffianly romance.

# BOOK THREE

# *THE PIRATE COAST*

## CHAPTER IX

DURING week-ends and in the afternoon, when the day's work was 000 finished and the heat of the sun had diminished, I would spend my spare time in studying Arabic, making entries in my personal diary, or taking walks into the surrounding desert. These walks were rather limited in scope, because one cannot go far in the sand on foot without getting tired, and there was little in the immediate vicinity of Sharjah in the way of scenic beauty. Bounded on the 133 north-west by the creek and the sea, Sharjah lies at the tip of the peninsula with nothing but flat, featureless desert between it and the mountain ranges, the nearest point of which is seventy miles. To the south-west, if you diverge from the coast-line, there is nothing but scrub and sandhills which stretch interminably into the Rub-al-Khali, that vast expanse of desert known as the 'Empty Quarter' whose width exceeds a thousand miles. I have heard of camel caravans which took a year to traverse this desert; they were on their way from Beraimi to Aden, and the journey occupied a year's travelling. During this time they encountered not more than five towns and ten Bedouin encampments.

One of my favourite walks was to the sheikh's watch-tower 000 which stood on a high sandhill five miles due east of the Fort. To approach it one had to pass a site known locally as the 'cemetery', where, scattered over a large tract of desert, were the wrecked remains of R.A.F. Bisleys, Wellingtons and Blenheims which had crashed in the vicinity. Fragments of airscrews, engine parts and spars lay in untidy heaps where they had been thrown by salvage parties or foraging Arabs, whilst the skeleton-like carcases of fuselage and cockpit were the haunt of snakes, lizards and desert rats.

It was a dismal sight, with the torn fabric fluttering in the wind, and perhaps a fragment of a glove or flying-helmet to remind one of a tragedy soon forgotten and all too common in the early days

000 of the war, when certain types of aircraft were unreliable and pilots inexperienced in desert conditions. A hundred yards away, on a hill surrounded by barbed wire, was the English cemetery. Here, a dozen little white wooden crosses marked the last resting places of men who would never again see the green fields and lanes of Kent or Yorkshire. Overhead, in the hard blue sky, the vultures soared and on the rocks the lizards scurried from the shadows of their wings.

A rough track in the sand led to the tower; it had been made by American trucks, the drivers of which had been hunting gazelle
712 or houbari, the wild bustard. The tower,[1] which was about sixty feet high, was built of large stones cemented together with *juss*, the local mortar. Situated on the highest part of the sandhill, a view of at least twenty miles could be obtained from the crenellated top. At dusk the sheikh's Askhari guards would take their stand beside a little peep-hole in the walls, on the look-out for any raiders who might venture into Sharjah territory. In the daytime a round boulder, cunningly camouflaged with rags to look like a human head, would be affixed to the battlemented top, and the effect of this simple deception was most realistic. For several weeks I was convinced that an Arab sentry was on guard there, even when I inspected it through Zeiss field-glasses, and it was only when I climbed the tower with one of the sheikh's sons that I discovered the trick. These towers are a regular feature of every Arab town in Oman, and one sees scores of them dotted all over the landscape, looking rather like old Norfolk mills without their sails.

133 A high ridge of dunes rises gradually behind the tower, and
137 from the top of these one has an amazing view of the distant mountains. Gilded by the late afternoon sun, the peaks and passes assume changing colours, varying from deep purple to misty violet and terra-cotta pink. The desert beyond the dunes changes in character, due probably to the presence of subterranean streams, and one finds miniature *wadhis* and *nullahs* luxuriant with neam copses, and mossy banks where lush grass grows between tiny desert daisies and dandelions. In these banks I have found clumps of those edible fungi, the *fagar* and *tartuth*, both Arab delicacies, bushes of wild berries, and stunted thorn trees called, I believe, Spici Christi.

136 Unfortunately my knowledge of botany and zoology is abysmally limited, and I was unable to identify many species which were unfamiliar to me; as a scientific record of wild life in the Gulf

1 - [The Sheikh's watch-tower 5 miles east of Sharjah]

—which this book makes no pretence to be—my remarks are of 136 little value. All I did was to make notes and sketches of what I saw. Thus it required no expert to identify the sand-piper skipping across the dunes; a sprightly, stone-coloured bird with a chirruping cry resembling the song, much amplified, of a cricket. On a neam tree my companion spotted a blue jay, more subdued in colouring than its European cousin, and took a snapshot of it before it took alarm and dived with flashing wings into a bush. Other species which haunt this valley are the hoopoe, known to the Arabs as *Upupa*, three of which I saw in July; the blue-headed wagtail, which has a rich yellow throat and belly and slate-blue back; the desert wheatear, stonechats, a small white owl, and a species of nightjar. Doves were fairly common in the groves of neam trees, whilst I saw numerous varieties of hawks and falcons.

A bird of passage in the Oman peninsula is the tiny green bee-eater (*Merops Orientalis*), a small colony of which I observed for several days in a clump of date palms, whilst a more frequent visitor was the roller, or blue jay (*Coracius Bengaliensis*), an emigrant from India. It has a lazy, undulating flight, and a harsh, corvine cry; its wings in flight are barred light and dark blue. In the valley beyond the tower small lakes of stagnant salt water are sometimes formed, the remnants of floods or high tides, and on these I have seen the white cattle egret (*Bulbulculus Ibis*), grey heron (*Ardea cinerea*), and wild duck.

What thrilled me as much as any of these was the little desert lark, which trilled its silvery notes high up in the blazing sky, or the kingfisher, flashing its silvery-blue wings across a *wadhi*. It was because they were so unexpected in this arid waste that they gave such pleasure. Most of the birds one finds in Oman are migrants from India and Africa, although the former predominate.

Of insects the most numerous are flies; black, buzzing flies of many species, which settle on one's head and shoulders in swarms; in the village booths they hover above the unsavoury dried meats and fish, dense clouds of them arising as you pass. There is a very interesting spider to be observed amongst the scrub in which it hides; less than a quarter of an inch long and half as broad, it curls up its legs when touched and looks just like a half-ripe wild strawberry. [825] The Arabs say its bite is poisonous, but I have held one in the palm of my hand without being bitten. Suleman Beg, our Indian sayce, once told me that the presence of these spiders indicates rain.

136 Locusts, of course, are the commonest insects of the desert next to flies, and the Anti-Locust Commission despatched to Oman by the Middle East Supply Organization has helped very greatly in their extermination by poisoning their breeding places. Dragonflies, larger than the English species, though less colourful, are common in the winter months, as are the red admiral, comma and tortoiseshell butterflies. Of ants, the soldier may be found in date plantations; otherwise the only other species I have seen is the black ant, equal in size to the English wood ant. Beetles are numerous, the most conspicuous being the black scarab, a fascinating creature to watch as it rolls little balls of dung along the sand.

137 Close to the watch-tower there is a little dell where tamarisk trees flourish for no apparent reason; their roots are exceedingly long, since each year they plunge further into the sand in search of water. My Indian gardener, Toni, attempted to dig one of these up as I thought it would look attractive if re-planted in front of the Fort. He found the task impossible; although the bush was barely five feet in height, the roots were still uncovered when he had excavated to a depth of seven feet. Anything seems to grow in this dell, from cinquefoil to ashkar plants, and I considered it would make an excellent flower and vegetable garden.

000 The Sheikh of Sharjah gave permission for me to cultivate the area, but when I explained to headquarters that, in order to grow vegetables in a satisfactory manner, at least twenty wells would have to be dug, six Indian gardeners employed, and a five-foot wall erected to keep out thieves and stray donkeys, the matter was discreetly shelved. A garden is possible in the desert, as has been proved at the Sheikh's Wells and in the Fort, but only at considerable expense. At present it is cheaper to send fresh vegetables to Sharjah by air, since they occupy little space in an aircraft.

137 Wild vegetation is sparse, except in the valleys, and consists mostly of scrub, a variety of stonecrop (whose stems contain reservoirs of fresh water), tamarisk, ashkar, and a grey, harsh-leafed, spiky plant I failed to identify. The desert is a paradise for rock-garden enthusiasts, and one finds many varieties of miniature plants, each with its tiny, star-shaped blooms of pink, white or yellow. After the rains grass comes up suddenly in hollows or beneath the neam trees, and the damp top soil is often covered with mushrooms, truffles, orchids and desert lilies. The desert truffle is a long-stemmed fleshy plant, shaped like a fat drum

stick, with a pink, cone-like tip. This plant, together with its black 137
roots, is much favoured by the Arabs as a delicacy. More unexpected
was the discovery of a solitary orchid, with red and yellow
flowers spotted with black, in shape and size resembling a hyacinth. I
did not see another specimen during the whole time I was in Arabia.

After the bare, flat desert which surrounded the Fort it was a
pleasant relief to glimpse this panorama of small *wadhis*, clumps of
feathery acacia and neam trees and the wig-like camel thorn. Here
the desert surges like a green and brown sea, until it meets the
mountains of the Shamailiyah at the horizon, the peaks of which
look deceptively closer than their seventy miles. Herds of camel 136
and gazelle graze peacefully at the scrub, and flocks of bustard
settle in the hollows; in a little gulley, between the roots of two
large neam trees, I saw a small, honey-coloured fox emerge from
his hole. At sunset one can hear the eerie call of the wild dog,
whilst nearer to the mountains the grey wolf hunts in packs and
creates havoc amongst the Bedouins' flocks of goats and sheep.

Mr. Williamson, a geologist employed by the Anglo-Iranian Oil Company, told me that he had shot a leopard in the mountains; but I never saw one myself and believe they are extremely rare in Oman. The commonest marsupial of all, of course, is the cheeky little desert rat, with its bat-like ears and long kangaroo legs.

One evening the Khan Bahadur drove me over to his garden 244
at the Sheikh's Wells. It consists of about an acre of sandy ground
with concrete channels for irrigation. A power-pump has been
installed, but is not working, and the gardeners obtain water
from the wells by means of buckets attached to long ropes. The
garden is shaded by palm trees, fig trees, pomegranates, zinnas,
cotton trees, limes, acacias and a tall maple species known as
ticoma. The soil has been well manured and is fertile, producing
excellent marrows, onions, brinjals (ladies' fingers), pumpkins,
radishes and gherkins. Adjoining this garden some of the villagers
have their own smallholding. We used to supply them with
vegetable seeds, and, in return for their labour in growing the
plants, we offered to buy the produce at slightly less than the
market price. Needless to say, nothing ever came up! Each
garden is about an acre in extent, and is divided into about twenty
sections, each of which belongs to a smallholder; there is a well to
every four sections.

Although I paid frequent visits to Captain Bird's official residence 000

0 00 at Sharjah creek, and was formally entertained by the sheikh once a
month, I seldom had the opportunity of visiting the town itself.
[361] Smaller and less scattered than Dubai, Sharjah is typically Arabian,
342 and the plain, square houses of the merchants, built of whitewashed
juss, bear a strange resemblance to the 'functional' houses publicized so much in the architectural press. They are based on a simple plan; in the centre is the courtyard, with the living quarters on one side, and the sleeping apartments on the other. They are seldom higher than two storeys, but an appearance of height is given to them by the tall, square wind-towers, or Persian ventilators, which circulate cool draughts of air throughout the house during even the hottest days.

A long covered corridor usually runs at the back of the house, linking the living and sleeping quarters, and behind this are the kitchen and lavatories. The two wings are also joined at the front of the house by a full-length veranda, where the owner and his
family sit in the evenings, drinking their sherbet or coffee. A rug
353 or coco-nut matting, a few plain teak chairs, or perhaps a small
tiled table, complete the furnishing of the average living room; the bedrooms are even more sparsely furnished, with little more than the canvas charpoy, or Indian bed, although many Arabs prefer to sleep on a rug on the floor.

000 It was during one of my occasional visits to Sharjah that I met Hassan bin Ahmidfa, the young son of a pearl merchant; his house is on the edge of the creek and is one of the largest and most elaborate in Sharjah, and furnished in the Turkish style. The huge doors leading to the courtyard are of unvarnished sandalwood, exquisitely carved with fabulous beasts and the conventional floral designs one sees on Kermani rugs. Hassan, who speaks flawless English, received part of his education at Bombay University, where he studied literature and economics, an unusual combination. He is very interested in Western culture and politics and extremely well-informed on most subjects.

Our conversations ranged from a discussion on Shaw to Schopenhauer and Kant, both of whose philosophies he found untrue and pessimistic; he could not agree that what the former called 'the world of ideas' had no objective existence apart from our sensory-perceptions of it, and argued that man could not attain happiness without realism. For an Oriental, Hassan was strangely materialistic, although it must not be assumed that the average Arab is a mystic; he is probably less so than the average German.

On hot evenings Hassan would provide me with a silk *kufieyh*, 000
or Arab gown—which I wore in place of my jacket and shirt; this is a loose, cool garment, ideal for desert conditions and climate. We would sit in rattan chairs on the roof overlooking the sea, sipping the delicious clove-flavoured coffee and discussing philosophy, belles-lettres, or the humanities. Because of his wide reading and understanding, Hassan could see life from the European as well as from the Arab point of view, and his interpretations of Arab mentality and character helped me considerably to understand his people.

Most of the Arab tribes in south-east Arabia are extremely 771
strict in their interpretation of the Koran but, as with the followers 782
of other religions, there are exceptions to this rule. Many who 785
profess and call themselves good Moslems are extremely unorthodox in practice. The fast of Ramadan is, without exception, vigilantly observed by all Mohammedans, but a great many Arabs, especially those of the merchant class, fail to observe the stern tenets of the Prophet. Prayers are dutifully said at the prescribed hours, especially at sunset, when the faithful perform their genuflections and prostrations with religious zeal. But the middle and upper classes are rather liberal in their religious ideas. It is not uncommon for 276
an Arab to smoke, even in public. The younger men prefer Turkish or Egyptian cigarettes, although most of the native shops in Sharjah and Dubai were well stocked with 'Lucky Strike', 'Camels' and 'Players', the source of these supplies being traceable to the U.S. and the R.A.F. canteens. The troops had no scruples about selling their rations for cash.

The older men would smoke native-grown tobacco in tiny pipes scarcely bigger than an acorn cup. After a few short puffs the brittle leaf would crumble into ashes, but they seemed to derive such pleasure from these brief smokes, perhaps because the leaf was tinctured with hashish. After use the pipe is placed in a small sheepskin pouch, which the Arabs carry about in the folds of their *abbas*, or gowns. The hubble-bubble is a Turkish innovation, used largely by the Persians and Parsees, and a crude form of this pipe is manufactured in Oman and sold in the bazaars.

The Arab seldom touches alcohol, and it is an offence to distil, 273
import or drink it in Sharjah territory. Nevertheless, a certain amount of bad Indian gin is brought in by the ships, and arrack is certainly distilled by the Indians in secret. I have never seen an Arab in these parts drink spirits, although an American officer once

273 told me that he had persuaded a lesser sheikh to drink a bottle of rye.

622 554 A Shiekh, it may be explained, is another name for Chief, although nowadays many of these petty rulers regard themselves as Princes; their desert forts have become palaces, and the advisers and secretaries who form the 'court' have been elevated to the rank of Ministers. This local grandeur is self-assumed, and the only genuine Prince in the Oman peninsula is the Sultan of Muscat. The Bedouins jokingly refer to the town sheikhs as 'Sand Kings', and the description seems to be an apt one.

551 554 The word 'sheikh' is fairly common as a name in Arabia, although it does not connote royal blood or connexions; we had a coolie in the Fort who was called Sheikh Ahmed. Similarly, the word 'Saiyed' is much used as a name, but bears no relation to the title Saiyed, borne by alleged lineal descendants of the Prophet or his son-in-law.

776 The Arab world has practised the doctrines of Islam for close
on thirteen centuries, yet even to-day one finds the people accept-
ing ancient beliefs and superstitions which are the heritage of
heathenism. The uneducated Arab firmly believes in the existence
of djinns, and nothing will persuade him to venture near a *wadhi*
or deserted building which tradition has made the home of these
777 monsters. Good and bad luck are ascribed by the faithful to Allah,
Whose ways are wise and inscrutable; yet even the orthodox will
admit—a trifle shamefacedly, perhaps—that such and such a
calamity was caused by a malicious djinn, or that the death of his
favourite camel was due to the evil eye of a neighbour.

755 Demoniacal possessions are cured by dancing to the throb of
drums, a survival, surely, of African rites, and it is significant that
most of these primitive beliefs are held by Arabs of African or negro
descent. But then, is there such a thing as a pure-blooded Arab?
000 I have heard people describe themselves as being pure-blooded
Irish, although they had less claim to consanguine purity than
myself; they took no account of the Danish, Norman, Spanish and
English invasions which swept the length and breadth of that small
island over a thousand years. Just as the Irishman is basically
Celt, the Arab is basically Semitic, but even the greatest ethnologist
or anthropologist cannot track down with absolute certainty the
ultimate origins of the Arab race; if it is one race. Head-measure-
ments and the division of skulls into brachycephalic and dolchy-
cephalic are all very well; they are useful for classifying the human

race into round-headed or long-headed types, Alpine or Mediterranean. One can find a dolchycephalic head in any part of China and match it with a hundred heads in India, Arabia, France, Zululand or England. 000

My own theory, and it is as good as that advanced by Bertram Thomas or any other Arabian traveller, is that there is not one Arab race, but many Arab races. The inhabitant of Arabia may be 144 termed an Arabian for geographical purposes, but ethnologically he may belong to the African race, the Persian or Iraqi race, or even the Turkestan race. Generally speaking, what is known as the true Arab is a Semite whose ancestors inhabited the Syrian and Palestinian deserts; some settled in Arabia proper, migrating as far south as the Gulf, whilst others trekked across Egypt and made their home as far west as the Atlas mountains, calling themselves Berbers and Senussi.

The tribes of Oman, Aden and the Hadramaut are undoubtedly 142 of partial Semitic ancestry, but there is strong evidence in their black, curly hair, heavier noses, dark-brown eyes and negritic lips of African origins. Apart from the vast slave traffic which was a feature of Arab economic life up to the late nineteenth century, trading between the African coast and southern Arabia was at one time the main source of prosperity and enabled the sheikhs to build their towns, harbours and pearling fleets.

In the days of Arab power, the southern sheikhs ruled the seas from Bombay to Madagascar; Zanzibar was captured by the ancestors of the present ruler of Muscat, and the sultan who rules Zanzibar to-day is a descendant of the same Saiyed family. It is evident that with this close connexion between southern Arabia and East Africa, which continued uninterrupted for many centuries, a widespread inflow of negro blood must have occurred. Arabs intermarried with their slaves, African merchants married Arab women, and only the upper and princely classes, as well as the nomadic desert tribes who did no trading, were able to preserve their Semitic purity of race. It is also quite probable that some of the aboriginal tribes or earliest settlers of Oman and the Hadramaut originally came over from the African continent.

The Arabs, like many other races priding themselves on their 186 breeding are, in reality, by no means pure-bred; but in their case, 144 their racial pride and extraordinary tenacity of tradition has enabled them to escape the usual effects of a dilution of the national stock.

The pure-blooded Bedouin, the gypsy of the desert, whom 000

The pure-blooded Bedouin, the gypsy of the desert, whom
771 one finds all over Arabia, is the most orthodox of all Arabs. He scorns with pious horror the tales of witches, djinns and devils.
[784 Yet even he will hesitate to slay a hyena; for do not witches ride
825] upon their backs when the moon is full? One cannot condemn these children of the sands for holding the unknown in such awe, or for peopling the *wadhis* and caves with imaginary forms. There
000 are people to-day in Ireland who believe in *sidhe* (fairies), descendants of the Firbolgs, and who shudder at the mention of banshee or leprechaun; the Scottish highlander is little less credulous, whilst in lonely parts of Wales old women still practise sorcery and stick pins in waxen images.

The Arabs have some reason to be superstitious. There is something formidable and furtive about the limitless expanse of the desert, with its distant mountains, its mirages and deep silences. Time in the clock sense has no meaning, and to-day is but yesterday to-morrow. Those who pray daily that the wells may not dry up; who subsist on rice and dates and dried fish; whose sole possessions are a camel, a donkey, two wives and a tent or palm-leaf hut, must think in terms of simple equations. If they personalize the unknown and the elements which control their lives, who are we to criticize them?

The stars that nightly twinkle above their goats'-hair tents; the Shimal that blows sand-clouds into their eyes and ears, and the pitiless sun which blackens every plant that dares to show a blade in summer—all these are no mere scientific phenomena to the Arab. The man who can read the life-history of a camel from a rough track in the sand has a dark mind which sees deep motives in all objective existence and even in inanimate things; he peoples his world with forms that are mere chimera to the Westerner. The mention of a unicorn does not make him laugh.

# CHAPTER X

FROM the roof of the Fort one has a fine view of the surrounding 361
desert. Due south-west the muddy creek curves like a snake past
the little town of Khan, a dependency of Sharjah. Only the tops
of the houses and the slender minaret are visible, since Khan is
hidden by sand-dunes and an enchanting copse of date palms.
The palm trees thicken as one looks further south, marking the
beginning of the flourishing plantations which screen the town of
Dubai, ten miles distant. Khan consists of about a hundred houses,
and is ruled by a headman; the inhabitants are fishermen, pearl 396
divers and sponge collectors. There is a very small boat-building 322
industry, whilst some charming brass-bound chests are made there 228
by native craftsmen; these chests are made of teak wood and are
usually lacquered, after the Kuwait fashion. The sponge industry
is unimportant and is confined to a few families. Men and women
wade into the creek at low tide to collect the sponges, which are
coarse and of an extremely poor grade. They cannot be exported
and are used by the local Arabs.

Sharjah, a large rambling town of about 10,000 inhabitants, 361
lies one mile north-west of the Fort, from which one has a fine view 712
of the half-ruined fort, from one of the towers of which flies the
sheikh's personal flag—a scarlet square with a wide white border.
This fort, or 'palace', which lies at the back of the town, was built
for strategic reasons with its gateway facing the open desert. The
Khan Bahadur told me that it is about four hundred years old; the
towers and the gateway were erected by the Portuguese, who
established military and trading outposts on the Persian Gulf coast
in the seventeenth century. Old ships' cannons, taken from the
wrecks of British and French merchantmen, ornament the front of
the fort; some bear the Admiralty anchor or the Royal insignia,
G.R. III, and though rusty and time-worn, are still fired by the
sheikh during tribal wars or on festive occasions.

The Persian Gulf was the haunt of pirates until almost the end 000
of the nineteenth century, and the waters around Sharjah and
Dubai were infested with these cruel and bloodthirsty sea-brigands,

000 most of whom belonged to the Quasimi clan, of which the Sheikh of Sharjah is the titular head. I have had many a joke with Sheikh Sultan and his nobles over stories of the old piratical days, and they were greatly amused to learn that my great-great-grandfather, who entered the Royal Navy as a midshipman in 1789, had taken part in a sortie against Sharjah in 1830, when his frigate shelled the town as a reprisal against a murderous attack on a British merchantman. I shall refer later to the history of piracy in Oman which, on account of the predatory raids on shipping, gained the title of 'the Pirate Coast' in the last century.

361
504 The town of Sharjah is built on the shores of the creek, the contour of which it follows in crescent shape until the open sea is reached; at low tide a spit of sand or 'bar', separates the creek from the Gulf. Only at low tide is it possible to cross the creek on foot and make the journey to Khan; on the far side of this sand-bridge or 'bar' there is a primitive wooden lighthouse, built by the sheikh for the guidance of the pearling boats, and a small colony of fishermen's huts. [342] The residences of the merchants, which are all two-storeyed buildings with wide verandas and imposing gateways, are built facing the sea, a distinct advantage in the hot weather. When a breeze is blowing, they are cooler inside in the summer months than an air-conditioned room at the Fort, and much more pleasant.

363
361 The town is about half a mile in length, and an eighth of a mile wide, with narrow, crooked streets running through the centre, and quaint, dark alleyways formed by the back walls of the houses. I could never get accustomed to the twists and curves of these streets, some of which were wide enough for only two people to pass abreast, although the Arabs used to ride donkeys and camels through them. Little doorways would suddenly open in the walls, whilst from a window high up would descend a cascade of refuse [531] or dirty water. Some of these doorways are extremely beautiful; shaped like the double doors of an old English church, they are set in a frame of decorated stone, and the unvarnished teak is studded with pointed brass knobs. Sometimes they are inset with a secondary door, large enough to admit one person.

437 One afternoon I accompanied the Station Engineer, Sparkes, to Sharjah on a shopping expedition; we took a mechanic, Mahmud, with us to act as interpreter. Sparkes wanted to haggle with one of the merchants, and rather impolitely declined to rely on my Arabic. He had recently purchased an old Arab seal, a large, oval

chalcedony stone with a faded inscription, and had taken it to the 437
silversmith to have it made into a ring; the purpose of his visit
was to collect and pay for it, not always a simple matter in Arabia,
where the merchant normally demands twice the legitimate price
and expects to be beaten down.

Mahmud, who is a Baluchi and lives with his family in the 361
poorer part of the town, took us through the less salubrious quarter.
Sharjah has no city wall proper, but its place is taken by a ring of 362
filthy hovels, the palm-thatched barousti huts of the coolies, slaves
and servants. The stench from these slums is unbearable in hot
weather, for each hut dweller uses his front door as a cesspool and
a refuse dump, and the place is infested with flies and insects; native
children crawl about in the sand, and mangy pai dogs snarl at one's
approach. These miserable hovels afford protection against neither
sun nor rain, and it is remarkable that their poverty-stricken
inhabitants are not afflicted with disease. The quarter is a disgrace
to Sharjah town and, although the Political Officer has
remonstrated with the sheikh about it, he refuses to have the place
rebuilt.

It was a pleasant relief to pass into the cool, dim alleys leading 363
to the town; many of them are roofed with palm-thatch and are 361
comparatively clean. The walls are honeycombed with doorways,
leading to the houses of the tradesmen and metalsmiths. After a
walk of fifteen minutes through the maze of dark, winding streets,
during the progress of which we were conscious of hundreds of
dark eyes staring curiously at us, we reached the sugar market. 443
This is a large square in the centre of the town; it is roofed-in with 366
huge strips of palm-matting, supported by whitewashed wooden
pillars, making it very dim inside.

Tethered to the pillars were six camels, snarling and grumbling; occasionally they tried to rise, but their forefeet were tied together and they would hobble for a few yards and quickly fall back on their knees. They had brought bags of sugar from a boat in the harbour, and their owners were arguing over prices with the brokers. The market, which is about six hundred feet square, contains warehouses, brokers' offices and shops on each side. We should have liked to take a photograph of it, but as Sparkes had no time-exposure on his camera he decided not to risk wasting his film.

The colour and variety of dress one sees in a native bazaar 291
is remarkable. The women are the least attractive, their trousers,
wraps and veils being of an unrelieved black; it is their menfolk

[Sharjah bazaar]

291 who wear the finery. Their *abbas*, or ankle-length gowns, are
of silk or linen, sometimes of a coarse, sackcloth material, but they
are dyed in a variety of colours, from red and brown to purple,
and those of the merchants are hemmed and embroidered with gold
and silver thread. The head-dress is often of brightly-coloured silk,
bound with an *aggal*, and the crescent-shaped sandals are invariably
decorated with stencilled dyes or gold thread. The wealthier
301 classes are fond of displaying jewellery, and like to wear large pearl
or diamond rings on their fingers; some wear ear-rings, giving them a
piratical air, whilst others wear or carry amber necklaces, which
they use for meditation and prayer as a Christian will use his rosary.

443 The shops in the bazaar are closed from midday to four o'clock,
512 as the Arabs take a siesta after lunch—a custom bequeathed by their
Moorish cousins to the Spaniards and observed in Spain to this day.
This adjournment is not due to laziness, but is extremely practical,
since the hottest time of the day occurs after twelve o'clock. At
4 p.m. the sun loses most of its heat and the streets are pleasantly
cool. The shutters are then pulled down from the shop fronts,
and the bazaar is thronged with gaily-dressed crowds of shoppers
and sightseers.

443 The shops are merely open booths, or stalls, exposed to sand
326 and flies, with the living quarters behind. As in China and
mediæval Europe, some of the trades, such as those of the tinsmiths,
467 silversmiths and leather merchants, are protected by guilds, and the
members confine themselves to special parts of the town or bazaar.
Thus in Sharjah there is a Street of Silversmiths, where these
merchants exercise their craft to the exclusion of all other trades;
Dubai similarly has a Street of Goldsmiths. These titles sound as
though they had been taken from *Hassan* or the *Arabian Nights* and,
indeed, the streets bear some resemblance to an Eastern stage
setting.

443 The food shops are always interesting. The wares are displayed in little palm-weave panniers, and include cinnamon, nutmegs, ginger and spices, huge lumps of unrefined rock salt, dried peas and beans, attar flour, ghee butter, pea-nuts, curry powder, chicory and rice. Under the shop front hang rows of locally-grown tobacco leaves, strips of henna, and various kinds of salted, odorous dried fish. A variety of smells, pungent and aromatic, comes from these booths in the hot weather and can be detected from quite a distance.

The most colourful shops are those of the drapers, where the

[Sharjah bazaar]

products of Bombay and Birmingham—gaily-hued sarongs, shirts 443 and scarfs—vie with cloths of native weave, and woollen cloaks washed, spun and woven in Dubai. Most of the drapers have a little haberdashery section, comprising pins, scissors, reels of cotton, tape and ribbons, in a glass case.

Foreign visitors usually find most delight in the carpet shops, where rugs from Ispahan, Sheraz, Kerman and Bushire lie in neat piles on the wooden floor; rugs of exquisite dyes and patterns may be obtained by those who are willing to pay the high prices demanded to-day—sometimes a hundred per cent higher than they were before the war. Really old and valuable carpets are rare and can usually be obtained only in Persia or India. There is, of course, the inevitable fake; a modern carpet designed in the seventeenth century style, which has lain in the streets of Teheran until the feet of goats, donkeys, camels and humans have worn it into the 'antique' texture.

A good modern carpet, of delightful colour, design, weave and nap, measuring about eight feet long by five feet wide, can be bought for sixty or a hundred rupees, according to the quality. For the poor man, there are machine-made rugs and carpets of traditional design, made in India, which cost from twenty rupees upwards. It is always advisable, however, to seek the advice of an expert when buying carpets in Arabia.

The 'mixed' general shop is usually worth a visit, for here one may find the wristlet watch or fountain pen which one lost in mysterious circumstances. Watches of good Swiss or American make are on sale at reasonable prices; my own 'Novoris', which came from Sharjah, cost only four pounds. Fountain pens, sunglasses, rings and brooches, adorn the shelves side by side with Muscat daggers, canned goods and foreign cigarettes. Between 265 every half-dozen booths is squeezed a café or coffee-shop, where the 517 Arabs laze away the afternoon to discuss business or the affairs of the town. Nearly all business deals are talked over in the dark corners of a coffee-shop, where a wheezy portable gramophone screeches interminably the latest Arab love-songs, most of them discreetly pornographic.

I liked best to stand outside the bakers' booths and watch them 252 make bread or rice-cakes. The dough would be kneaded and pummelled into shape in a bowl-shaped depression on a stone slab. When judged to be of the right consistency, it would be placed on a long-handled ladle, the blade of which is latticed like

[Sharjah bazaar]

252 a grid-iron, and placed directly on the glowing embers of the oven. Baked in this manner, the flat loaves of unleavened bread were crisp and brown in a few minutes, and tasted delicious. Arab children would crowd round the bakers' shop in little groups, fascinated by the dexterity with which the baker tossed the dough into the air with the ladle before consigning it to the fire.

326 In the quarter of the town where the tinsmiths and ironsmiths plied their trades, one could always be sure of finding something of interest. Here the shops of the blacksmiths exhibit all their primitive skill. A sheep's or pig's bladder is used as a bellows, and the fire, anvil and the blacksmith are all contained in a deep pit. Tools, nails, wrought-iron ornaments and domestic utensils are made in this crude manner from long iron bars, or 'scrap',
[415] which is imported from India. The tinsmiths are equally dexterous in the manufacture of pots, pans, kettles and bowls, the basic material for which is provided out of old R.A.F. petrol cans. Some of the tin bowls are extremely decorative, being washed in copper and engraved with a hand-beaten design.

As we strolled away from the bazaar we encountered Hassan bin Ahmidfa, the young pearl merchant; he proved to be an excellent guide and companion, having a good sense of humour. He conducted us through a maze of alleyways until we came to the Street of Silversmiths, where wrinkled old men sat cross-legged, making their trinkets. Hossein, a white-haired smith with a beard and blue eyes, squatted over a hole in the ground filled with glowing charcoal. He kept this at the right temperature by means of a small sheepskin bellows. The silver he uses is made from rupee coins, which he melts down and then beats into thin wire.

306 He produced a tray full of semi-precious stones—agate, jade, chalcedony and jasper, some carved with Arabic inscriptions—which he uses as ring-settings. The stone Sparkes had chosen was a fine oval chalcedony with the words 'Mohammed bin Ali' engraved in old script. The setting consisted of a central hoop of thick silver, with two loops of twisted silver wire, hinged on either side. It looked barbaric, and the silver was rough and unpolished, but it made an effective ornament. I gave an order for a similar ring, to present to my wife, the cost being agreed, after some haggling, at five rupees.

294
443 Returning to the bazaar, we passed the tailors' shops, where men sat cross-legged on little wooden stools, sewing by hand or by machine, and I was reminded of the cobbler's scene in *Chu Chin*

[Sharjah bazaar]

*Chow*. These narrow, twisting streets have changed little in the 294
last four or five centuries, and a similar scene must have presented 443
itself to Haroun al Raschid as, disguised as a beggar, he crept
through the dark thoroughfares of Baghdad. When I was in
Sharjah I read that his palace had been excavated, but the Arabs
with whom I discussed this interesting piece of archæology were
not interested. They have a superstitious dislike of Haroun, and
do not like to talk about the *Arabian Nights*, though I could never
discover the reason for this.

The tailors make up most of the Arab *abbas* and *kufieyhs* from imported cloth of Indian manufacture; before the war a great deal of woollen and cotton fabrics came from Manchester, but it will probably be some time before the English piece-goods market is extended to Arabia again. We examined their wares; Indian-made shirts imported from Karachi, soft, woollen Kashmir shawls with hand-embroidered designs of birds and flowers in glowing colours; rich silks, sarongs and turbans, and large bales of coloured cloth for Arab children.

The streets are always congested at this hour. Not only Arabs, 363
but goats and donkeys, throng the narrow ways, so that one con-
tinually brushes shoulders with the crowd and cannot avoid its
inescapable stench. The peasant women seem dirtier than the 515
men; this is presumably because their black cotton garments do
not show the dirt, and are therefore seldom washed. Many of the
younger women walked about unveiled and, in spite of their
belladonna-stained eyes and henna-red lips, some of them were
astonishingly lovely. They gave us coquettish glances as we
passed, but even the most amorously-inclined Westerner would
lose his ardour if he inhaled the nauseating odour of their persons.

Before we left Sharjah, Hassan suggested that we should take 265
a cup of Turkish tea, so we sauntered into an open-air tea shop and
sat on hard benches polished by much use. A handsome young
Arab brought us tall, narrow glasses containing very sweet, warm
tea, unclouded by milk; it was very aromatic and agreeable. The
benches were arranged in a square, in the centre of which were
stalls displaying cakes and sweetmeats, a large urn, and the inevitable
gramophone. An old Arab sat smoking his hubble-bubble and 533
changing the records; in return for this service he was supplied by 265
the proprietor with free tea. The words of the songs, which
Hassan translated for our benefit, were mostly concerned with the
plaintive laments of unsuccessful lovers, suggesting that the crooner's

533 complaint is not confined to the B.B.C. I have heard similar
265 songs in China and Oklahoma, and assume that unrequited love is a
global ailment.

At a sign from Hassan, the old record-player began to play
some tangos which took me back to the late twenties, and the
audience began to smile broadly and drummed on the tables with
265 their fingers in response to the rhythm. Most of the café habitués
517 were business men and shopkeepers, who assembled there daily
521 to discuss stocks and prices. Two of them came to sit by us and
the conversation, directed by the learned Hassan, turned to religion,
or rather the differences of the Mohammedan and Christian versions.
The similarity between certain passages of the Koran and those of
the Bible were seized upon, and a bearded patriarch confessed with
a twinkle in his eyes that the Prophet had been well-informed in
the gospel of Christ and, as all knew who had read both holy books,
had derived not a little inspiration from the parables.

771 The essential differences of the two religions lay in their conception of morality; thus some Christian concepts of human behaviourism, such as the negation of violence and vengeance, are diametrically opposed to the tenets of Islam. The Koran has a great deal of beauty, however, and its teaching of brotherly love and its philosophy of man's essential one-ness in the sight of God, alone have given it a deserved immortality. A really good Mohammedan is, in some ways, better than a good Christian; he will certainly die for his religion, if needs be, and his concept of life is far less material than that of the confirmed church-goer.

000 Hassan mentioned several Englishmen who have been converted to Islam, among them the late Lord Headley, President of the British Muslim Society, and the patriarch told us, to our great surprise, that he had made a journey to London some years ago and visited the mosque at Woking. He had a very great admiration for Lord Headley, a Haji who had made the pilgrimage to Mecca, and whom he regarded as sincere and devout.

The sun was sinking below the house-tops, gilding the streets with a golden haze, so after shaking hands with the merchants and making our salaams, we rose and departed back to the Fort.

113

## CHAPTER XI

GENERALLY speaking, the Arab tribes of the Trucial Oman Coast 181
are peace-loving people who are content to cultivate their date plantations, rear their herds of camels and goats, or spend two seasons of the year at the profitable pearl-fisheries. Tribal wars [721]
have become less frequent, and raids on villages are nearly always confined to the Bedouin and other nomadic tribes. Meeting an Arab in Sharjah or Dubai at the present day, it is hard to realize 176
that his great-grandfather was in all probability a savage, ruthless 721
pirate who plundered ships and murdered their crews without mercy. The ancestor of the present sheikh, and the forebears of most of his nobles were men of this calibre.

Piracy in the Persian Gulf has as ancient a history as pearl fishing and, like pearling, most of the able-bodied men of the coastal towns and villages were engaged in it. It was a safe and easy game in the days of the old sailing ships, when contrary winds would lure unsuspecting mariners to an uncharted reef, on which, perhaps, a light was showing. The Arab pirates, like the Cornishmen of old, were skilful wreckers. As soon as the ship grounded, scores of *bagrahs*, or rowing-boats, would set out from the shore, and from these the pirates would leap aboard; armed to the teeth and bent on murder, they rarely took prisoners, and would burn the ship before they left, thereby destroying evidence for a prowling frigate to discover. Yet, as one finds from a study of the interesting official documents on piracy which, still unpublished, lie in the archives of the Indian Government, fortune did not always favour the pirates.

It must be said in defence of the Trucial Coast tribes, that they are by nature peace-loving and friendly, and although among the seafaring classes piracy was a fairly common pastime for centuries (as it was amongst the English, French and Americans), it did not extend to the fishermen, pearl divers and townsmen until the end of the eighteenth century. The adoption of piracy by the latter classes was almost entirely due to the pressure and influence of the Wahabis, the fanatical sect which at that time over-ran Oman and

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did all in its power to incite the tribes against foreign enterprise in the Gulf. This policy was not agreeable to all the tribes, many of which found trading with the infidel to be profitable; but others were easy tools in the hands of the Wahabis, notably the Quasimi tribe, which was invariably eager for plunder of any sort.

The establishment of the Wahabis at Baraimi was followed by an increase of piracy and lawlessness at sea, which in India was ascribed chiefly to their influence. However, the Government of Bombay showed a degree of forbearance towards the pirates which it is difficult to understand. It appears to have been a standing order of the Government that none of their vessels in the Gulf should fire until they had been fired upon—a rule which placed their small and isolated cruisers at a dangerous disadvantage in dealing with an enemy whose favourite method of attack was by boarding; and offenders against this regulation were liable to heavy punishment. On one occasion Lieut. Gowan, of the *Fury*, 6 guns, having beaten off a number of boats which closed in upon him with hostile intent during a calm, received on arrival at Bombay a severe reprimand from the Governor in person 'for daring to molest the innocent and unoffending Arabs of these seas'.

To give one example of the methods of the pirates, I will quote the following incident, extracted from official documents:

On 21st October, 1808, the H.E.I. Company's cruiser *Sylph* of only 78 tons, mounting 8 guns, was approached by a fleet of large Arab vessels. She had been accidentally separated from the squadron which carried Sir Harford Jones and the members of his Mission to Persia, and Muhammad Hussain Khan, one of the Persian secretaries attached to this Mission, was actually on board the ship at the time. Precluded by regulations from using her guns until it was too late, the tiny vessel fell an easy prey to the crowd of boarders which the Arab ships hurled on her deck from their towering bows.

A wholesale massacre of her crews, who died fighting desperately, was the sequel. Among the few survivors of the action were the commander, Lieut. Graham, who fell, covered with wounds, down the fore hatchway, and the Persian secretary, who hid himself in a cabin locker. The lives of the remnant were saved by the sudden appearance on the scene of H.M.S. *Nereide*, Commodore Corbett, a frigate of 36 guns, at the sight of which the Quasimi took to flight in their own vessels, abandoning the *Sylph*, and were pursued for some distance by the *Nereide*, but without success.

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Piracy continued unabated until, in September, 1809, a naval and military expedition was sanctioned by the Governor-General of India (whose policy of appeasement had got him into trouble with the home government), the object of which was to destroy completely the sea power of the piratical tribes known under the general name of 'Quasimi', also to release British subjects and others held in bondage, and to obtain the return of several places on the Oman Coast to Sayid Sa'id, Sultan of Muscat, which had been taken from him by the Quasimi.

The expedition arrived at Muscat on 24th October, and was joined by gentlemen of Sir John Malcolm's Mission to Persia, who 'most handsomely volunteered their services'. After revictualling, the expedition proceeded to Ras-al-Khaimah, which was reached on 11th November; but owing to the shallowness of the water it was obliged to anchor two to four miles from the town, according to their size. The action began when the British fleet fired on the *Minerva*, a captured vessel which the Arabs had mounted with twenty guns, and which was starting on a cruise. Heavy fire from the shore forts prevented her seizure, but she was burned. In the action the cruiser *Prince of Wales* went aground and was subjected to a fusillade from shore batteries.

On the 12th the town was heavily bombarded by the fleet, and on the 13th, under cover of a barrage, marines and sepoys were landed at the harbour mouth and waded ashore. After heavy hand-to-hand fighting the walls of the town were scaled and, at two o'clock in the afternoon, the centre of the town had been gained and the British flag been hoisted on the sheikh's palace. Thirty large war boats were set on fire, some booty obtained by individuals, but on the 14th, in consequence of a report that a large force of Wahabis was approaching from the interior, Colonel Smith, anxious to avoid further conflict with his small force, hurriedly re-embarked his troops.

During the entire action at Ras-al-Khaimah, two men were killed on board the *Prince of Wales*, and Captain Dansey of the 65th Regiment was slain by a spear which struck him in the neck while he was clearing a house in the town; the wounded numbered twenty-one. But for the screen formed by the smoke of burning houses the British losses would, it is said, have been much heavier.

175 721 Incidents like the above continued unabated throughout the century. In 1820 a general Treaty of Peace was signed, which included the submission of Sultan-bin-Saqr, Sheikh of Sharjah (who, on leaving the hospitality afforded him by the Sultan of Muscat, apparently took to piracy as a quick means of recovering his lost fortunes), and the Sheikhs of Dubai, Ras-al-Khaimah, Bahrain, and Abu Dhabi. Piracy abated somewhat in the next ten years, but in 1850 we hear of further attacks on British merchant ships, and depredations on shipping continued, in spite of severe reprisals and fines, until the end of the century.

It was the appearance of the steamship, with its greater speed, independence of winds, and heavier gun power, which really brought piracy to a close. The Arabs realized that it was suicide to attempt to pit their wooden ships and boats against modern sea power, and the few who stuck to piracy confined their attacks to smaller, unarmed sailing ships.

The establishment of order at sea was necessarily a gradual process, but by 1890 piracy had ceased to be a popular profession. There were sporadic outbreaks in the last few years of the century, and as late as 1905 a British merchant vessel was attacked. But the Wahabi influence had long been broken, the fight against iron-clad men-o'-war was unequal, and the old piratical tribes settled down once more to the safer occupation of fishing and pearl-diving.

Piracy is dead in the Persian Gulf, although isolated attacks on dhows still occur. As recently as 1944 a large Arab dhow, containing food supplies on its way to Dubai, was attacked by a native sailing ship and the crew murdered. The matter was immediately reported to the Political Officer, Captain Bird, who ascertained that the pirates came from a village on the Persian side of the Gulf, near Jask. Representations were made to the Iran Government, and it is believed that the culprits were apprehended and hanged, suitable compensation being paid to the dependents of the victims. To-day piracy is frowned upon by all sections of the community; even the sheikhs consider it is no longer respectable.

[433] 396 501 Fishing and pearling have replaced the more violent forms of sea traffic, and shipbuilding remains an important industry on the Trucial Coast. The war has held up supplies of timber and sail-cloth, which came from India, but several large boats have been built from stocks of old material. The largest dhows, which sometimes sail as far south as South Africa and can easily make the passage

to India, are about two hundred feet long and of several hundred 396
tons. They have a high poop deck and a lofty covered gallery 501
at the stern, which give them the appearance of galleons; in fact,
they are said to owe their design to the Portuguese vessels which
sailed these waters in the seventeenth century.

The timbers are caulked with glue and lime and the highly
polished hulk is preserved with shark's oil. Oars are used to
manœuvre the vessels when in shallow water, and these sometimes
attain a length of nearly thirty feet and require half a dozen men to
handle them. To witness the pearling fleet as it sets out at sunset 228
for the pearling beds, at the beginning of the season, is an experience 501
long remembered; the sky is radiant with purple and gold, and the
silhouettes of the sails, like bats' wings, dance on the sparkling
sea. It is a picture suggestive of peace, but to the foreigner of a
hundred years ago those sails must have been symbols of menace.

# CHAPTER XII

000 MAY was a very hot month, and an unusually active one for the staff at the Fort, so that I was able to undertake only two desert expeditions, firstly to Ajman, where I accompanied the sheikh on a gazelle hunt; and secondly, to Dhaidh, to which place Captain Tandy, the new Political Officer, took me on an official visit to Sheikh Mohammed Ali, ruler of the Beni Qitab tribe. It was my ambition whilst in Arabia to visit Riyadh, the capital of the Nejd, and meet King Ibn Saud, if this could be arranged. Permission for the visit first had to be obtained from the Saudi Arabian Government, to whom one had to give reasons for the journey, proposed method of travel, proposed date of entry into the Nejd, and the route to be followed.

Through the offices of the Khan Bahadur, who wrote several letters on my behalf, I first applied to H.M. Minister at Jedda, for permission to enter the country. Preliminary arrangements were made to commence the journey at Al Khobar, the Gulf port close to Bahrain Island, to which I should fly from Dubai. The desert trip from there to Riyadh would have to be made by car, which the American-Arabian Oil Company kindly offered to provide at a reasonable cost. The entire journey would have occupied about five days each way, and I was hoping to visit Riyadh during my fortnight's local leave; this would have given me four days in the capital. Unfortunately, owing to the political situation prevailing at that time, permission was not forthcoming, and there were so many delays that I decided to abandon the idea altogether and to go instead into the unexplored Rub-al-Khali desert.

The aircraft services had recently been increased by the addition of a Dakota service to India, so that we were receiving nearly two landplanes a day, in addition to the flying-boat services. There were several night-stops, which always meant extra work, and the situation was not eased by our woeful shortage of transport. Several Sunderland boats landed at Dubai owing to engine trouble, and it was necessary to borrow vehicles from the R.A.F. in order to bring the passengers and crew across the desert to Sharjah.

It was, indeed, a month of incidents. Several members of my ODC
Indian staff fell sick; I had trouble with the Sikh carpenters who had been sent from Karachi to re-build one of the launches, and they had to be sent back; the Bedouins had encamped on the sandhills between Sharjah and Dubaī, and were giving trouble to our convoys; one of the turbines of the power station broke down, and a sit-down strike among the Arab workmen held up the work of building the new staff quarters' block. I had already been criticized by headquarters for not speeding up this work, which was not my responsibility but that of the Public Works Department.

The excuse given by the senior engineer was that shortage of materials was responsible for the delay, but on investigation it transpired that lack of proper supervision was the real cause of the trouble. The overseer was an Assyrian, and he had little authority over the Arabs, who would work only when they were closely watched. Directly the overseer's back was turned they would sit on the roof and go to sleep. The foundations and walls had been erected months ago, but the building was still roofless in May; as a result, the wooden frames of the doors and windows were beginning to shrink and crack. Eventually the supervision was put in charge of an R.A.F. corporal—a native of Cardiff—and within two weeks the Arabs were working like slaves and the roof was finished.

During this period I had numerous visitors who were far from
welcome, but whom I had to entertain for political reasons. The 62
Sheikh of Sharjah usually came twice a week, bringing his sons and 574
secretary with him. As his visits usually lasted for two hours 609
it meant that my morning's work was set aside. It was customary to serve him with fruit and coffee, either in the mess or on the roof-garden of the Fort, and on each occasion he managed to consume our total supplies of fruit. Quite often the bearers had to raid our staff supplies, from bedroom tables, in order to satiate his greed. I was obliged to sit through this gorging performance and make polite conversation.

The sheikh's visits always had an underlying motive; either he wanted to borrow spare parts for his car, or wished the radio officer to repair his wireless set; sometimes he wanted me to order him some fruit from India, or give him a supply of vegetable plants and flowers. When he sat in the mess, he invariably removed copies of *The Tatler* or *Country Life*, although he could read neither of these publications. These visits were made in ceremonial dress,

622 including gold swords and daggers, and he was accompanied by
574 his ruffianly guard—who also expected coffee. There was nothing
609 informal about Sheikh Sultan, and each time he came to the Fort
I was obliged to make a rapid change from shorts and bush shirt into my palm beach uniform.

The Sheikh of Dubai, who never asked any favours but who once sent me two beautiful pearls as a gift, paid but one visit to the Fort. That was in the company of all the sheikhs of the Trucial Oman Coast, who assembled there to meet the British Resident, Sir Geoffrey Prior, and journey with him to the neutral territory of Baraimi, where he held a 'durbar'. Next to Sultan bin Saqr, my most frequent visitor was the picturesque Sheikh of Ajman, Raschid bin Hamid, a handsome man of thirty, who resembled the pre-Raphælite portraits of Christ. He was tall for an Arab, with an aristocratic bearing and clean-cut features. Of pure Bedouin stock, he had their fair skin and piercing blue eyes, and wore a carefully oiled and trimmed black beard. Raschid was the only sheikh in Oman to own horses, which are not suited to this part of the Arabian desert; he was a superb horseman and a great hunter.

Sheikh Raschid had a tremendous sense of humour and I believe he only came to the Fort to plague me. He would arrive at the most unexpected and inconvenient times, bringing with him a ruffianly rabble of hangers-on, including his chief minister, or wazir, Hussein, a grimy looking old villain who spoke a few words of execrable English. Sultan bin Saqr, who was his overchief, did not approve of these visits, since Raschid was only a sub-chief of Ajman, a small dependency of Sharjah. Raschid was full of intrigue, and was believed to be making secret agreements with the Americans, authorizing them to drill for oil on his territory; this was strictly against the treaty which Sultan bin Saqr had signed with the British Government and gave rise to considerable local embarrassment. The wily Raschid knew quite well that he could not implement his promises, and yet had no scruples in taking money for these illegal concessions.

The Khan Bahadur asked me on one occasion to try and discourage Raschid from paying his tiresome visits to the Fort, but he was so persistent that the task was a well-nigh impossible one. It was impossible to offend him; if one were at all brusque he would roar with laughter, take one by the arm and begin a long discussion about his latest hunting trip. I liked him immensely, for he was

really a most lovable ruffian, his Christ-like face contrasting oddly 622
with the fanatical fire in his eyes. Hussein, his minister, despite 574
his dirty clothes and unkempt beard, also amused me very much; 609
he carried a huge sword, whilst his belt was always bulging with weapons—knives, Muscat daggers, and a Mauser pistol. He was the living embodiment of Captain Teach, the eighteenth century pirate.

Sheikh Raschid was always pestering me to visit his 'palace' at Ajman and accompany him on a gazelle hunt so, partly in order to placate him and partly because I liked the rascal, I eventually agreed to accept his invitation. I chose a week-end in May when, owing to bad weather at Barhain and Karachi, aircraft had been held up for a few days. Ellis, the Station Engineer, who had performed several tasks for the sheikh, was also invited, and we made arrangements to set off in one of the cars after lunch. A few minutes before we were due to leave the Fort three camels put in an appearance. The servant who brought them explained that Sheikh Raschid bin Hamid considered that they would be more comfortable for the journey.

As a rule I dislike riding camels; I consider they are one of the 492
most uncomfortable modes of transport ever discovered. In 487
this case, however, I was glad of them. The route to Ajman lies through tracks of deep, soft sand, in which the tyres of vehicles invariably get stuck. To extricate them is a long and difficult task, frequently requiring the aid of another vehicle. Soft sand is far worse than mud, and even if the wheels do not sink in it, they slip and slither all over the place, so that it is a matter of extreme luck if you do not hit a palm tree or a rock. Wheel chains are of little help, as they seem to plunge the car deeper into the sand. The only way to negotiate soft sand successfully is to drive at great speed and take a zig-zag course.

Ajman lay to the north of Sharjah, beyond the little fishing village 361
of Hera; the distance was not more than five miles but the camels were slow and it took us an hour to reach the outskirts of the town. There are two Ajmans on the map—the town proper and the district surrounding it, which has an area of about ten square miles. Most of it is bare desert, full of *wadhis* and sandhills, but near the sea-shore there are flourishing date plantations, whereas Sharjah does not boast a single one.

The town is much pleasanter than Sharjah. The track leading to it is indescribably bad, being full of pot-holes, old wells, rocks

361 and dunes of soft sand, but the approach is through a cool grove of palm trees, with gardens on either side. The houses and streets are neat and clean, the town being planned in four sections in the form of a cross. Each section is surrounded by gardens and palm plantations, with a high fence of palm leaf matting to shield it from the dust and wind. Raschid may be a wily rascal but he understands the basic principles of town planning and his town is an example of what can be done in the desert.

The desert track ended just outside the town, giving way to a wide road with a hard surface, suitable for any type of car. Green palm trees waved on either side of the road and the air was full of the song of birds. The bazaar lay to our left, on the seaward side, but we skirted this and rode straight ahead towards the palace. 712 This is a large, imposing building, with great buttresses and cliffs of honey-brown sandstone rising straight out of the sand. Architecturally, it is one of the finest forts in Oman, with ramparts and crenellated towers resembling those of the crusaders' castles at Acre. The two large towers, facing south, and the bastions are of seventeenth century Portuguese design, and the pitted, battered walls are evidence of the turbulent history of this desert outpost, for the people of Ajman were once the most warlike of all the tribes.

We dismounted outside the main gateway, where Raschid bin Hamid, Hussein and other members of the court were waiting to greet us. This gateway, cut in a side wall, is small and rather insignificant, but no doubt it was built thus for strategic reasons. There is a larger gate on the west side, heavily barred and studded with brass nails, set in a thirty-foot wall, but this is never used. To the left of this gate the wall is overhung with a large veranda, with grilled and fretted windows; behind this lie the women's quarters and the harem.

There are some remarkably fine cannon outside the fort, varying from small bronze culverts of Portuguese origin, to twelve-pounders of Crimean vintage, still suspended on their original wooden wheels. The muzzles of small brass cannons bristle from the loopholes in the walls of the fort, but their use is purely decorative. An air of decay pervades the huge building and the sandy plaster is falling from the walls, but even in dilapidation it is extremely picturesque.

576 Sheikh Raschid shook hands and then embraced us in the Arab fashion, brushing our cheeks with his bearded lips, which smelt of perfume and tobacco.

perfume and tobacco. He then took us by the hand and led us 000 0
through the courtyard into the guest chamber. A terrace of black 353
marble steps led up to it, through a little brass-studded door, which
he unlocked. The chamber was a typical Arab interior. Shiraz
and Turkish rugs covered the stone floor, and the furniture consisted
of a Moorish-type table, inlaid with mother-o'-pearl, a cane
settee, and a few plush-seated chairs. The walls, however, were
not plain as were those of Sheikh Sultan's palace; leather saddles of
sheepskin, decorated with red wool fringes, hung from iron hooks;
there were numerous photographs of the sheikh and his relatives, as
well as a small armoury. This included an old flintlock gun, a 622
German Mauser pistol (presented to the sheikh by King Ibn Saud, 411
from whom he bought his horses), a .22 Martini rifle, and a long
hiltless battle sword in a black leather scabbard, richly decorated
with bands of damascened gold.

Raschid showed us his armoury with great pride, and explained
in detail the history of each exhibit. He then took the battle
sword from the wall; it was at least five feet in length and, as he
withdrew the blade from the scabbard, he gave it a quick twist
with his wrist. The blade shivered and sang like a tuning fork.
I tried to do the same but the sword was exceedingly heavy to
handle and I failed to get any 'tune' out of it. Raschid told us
that the sword was forged for his ancestors at Damascus four
hundred years ago, and was a sword of honour. It had been
used in battle, as a two-handed weapon, and was reputed to have
slain a hundred men.

The sheikh's little son, Abdul bin Hamid, wore a curved Muscat
dagger of great beauty, the scabbard and hilt being of chased gold.
We sat on cushions on the floor, and were joined by the sheikh's 291
elder son, aged eleven, and a four years' old girl, a black-eyed little
mite with pigtails, who was evidently a great favourite of the
sheikh's. She wore a little tunic of silk taffeta, richly embroidered
short silk trousers and sandals of gazelle skin; her bare ankles were
covered with silver rings. She looked thoroughly spoiled, and
had the manner of an autocrat, screaming shrilly at her brother
whenever he dared to touch her rag doll.

Hussein, the wazir, entered the chamber with a secretary and 264
some other relatives of the sheikh, including an elderly uncle from
Baraimi, and after we had exchanged greetings and washed our
hands in the silver bowl, slaves were summoned to bring in the
dinner. It was rather early for a meal, and we had not long since

264 had lunch, but it was not possible to decline the dishes placed before us. In the centre of the dining-mat was a huge bowl of rice and steamed sheep, very fat and oily; chipatties, truffles, curry, sheep's liver, and pastry puff balls filled with honey. The sheikh presented me with a large piece of fat with his own hands, and I felt sick before it had entered my mouth.

272 After the meal we again washed our hands and sat drinking
out of little brass cups of bitter coffee. Cigarettes were produced
576 and all smoked except the uncle from Baraimi. The conversa-
tion, as is customary during social calls, began with polite enquiries
after one's health. Raschid then recounted some of his experiences
in the hunting field, and sent his son to bring a pile of fine gazelle
skins, trophies of the chase; one of especial beauty and fine marking
533 he presented to me, together with a pair of horns. The wazir,
Hussein, looked as though he were tired of the conversation, and
produced a blackwood reed from the folds of his *abbas* and began
to play a wistful little tune. Abdul bin Hamid sang in a high-
pitched voice and we sat back on our cushions and listened. The
tune was monotonous and without melody, but it had a weirdly
fascinating rhythm.

622 The sheikh, whose tales of the hunt were thus rudely inter-
rupted, grew restless; he belched aggressively and pulled at his
beard. At length, losing all patience, he rose abruptly and sig-
nalled us to follow him through the courtyard. Hussein went on
playing his melancholy tune, so we wandered through the fort
with Raschid and his daughter. Scores of ragged children came
into the courtyard to stare at us; they were nothing to do with the
sheikh, unless they were children of his servants, and he took no
notice of them. With his twinkling blue eyes, humorous mouth
and hawk-like nose, he might have been an Eastern king, bene-
volent and wise, surrounded by his subjects. He had perfect
teeth, stained at the edges by tobacco, and on his finely-shaped
hand wore a large cornelian stone, engraved with an account of his
[554] descent. The Arabs do not as a rule have a crest or heraldic design,
although some of the sheikhs display a badge, usually in the form
of a crescent or sometimes a bird or lion which is engraved on
seals and the backs of chairs.

291 Raschid on this occasion wore a very barbaric-looking turban
of white and purple Kashmir wool and looked more like a pirate
231 than ever. When we had seen over the fort, many of the rooms
of which were completely bare, he conducted us to the stables

where he keeps his famous stud of Arabs. He has fifty stallions and mares, two of which were in foal; a few were of pure Nejd breed, some were Anazehs, and the rest mixed Arab and Rahwan (Kurdish) blood.

The stables consisted of a long, covered shed running round the inner walls; under this covering the horses are picketed during the night, but in the daytime they are allowed to stretch their legs at pleasure within the central courtyard. The majority were loose; a few, however, were tied up at their stalls, whilst some had horse-cloths over them. These cloths are necessary as a protection against the heavy morning dews; I was also told that a northerly wind will occasionally injure the animals here. About half the 'royal' stud were either in the stalls or the courtyard, the rest being out at grass.

No Arab dreams of tying up a horse by the neck; a tether replaces the halter, and one of the animal's hind-legs is encircled about the pastern by a light iron ring, furnished with a padlock and connected with an iron chain about two feet long, ending in a rope, which is fastened to the ground at some distance by an iron peg. This is the customary method, but if an animal becomes restless and troublesome a foreleg is put under similar restraint. Horses in Arabia are much less frequently vicious or refractory than in Europe, which is one reason why geldings in the desert are comparatively rare.

Raschid bin Hamid's horses were a lovely collection. Their stature was rather low; none came fully up to fifteen hands. Fourteen hands seemed about their average, but they were so exquisitely well-shaped that want of greater size seemed hardly a defect. Remarkably full in the haunches, with elegantly-shaped shoulders, they were just slightly saddle-backed, with a curve indicating springiness rather than weakness; a broad head above, tapering down to a nose rather small and sharp, with a full eye, sharp, thorn-like little ear, clean and sinewy legs, and a neat, round hoof. The mane is worn long, but is not heavy, and the tail is thrown out at a perfect arch. The prevailing colours were white, chestnut, grey, a light bay and an iron colour. Raschid proudly told me some of their pedigrees—Manakee, Siklamee, Hamdanes, Tarypee—names well known to breeders of horses throughout the world.

A few of the horses were of degenerate breed, closely resembling the 'tatties' used in India as cab horses, but they were kept for hack

231 work and not for hunting. The Arab horse is much gentler than the English horse, and is very obedient to knee and thigh, and to [492] the slightest check of the halter and the voice of the rider. They are often ridden without bit or bridle, and have great speed and endurance, being able to keep going for twenty-four hours in the burning sun without water or signs of flagging.

At the sheikh's invitation I mounted a little bay mare and, without saddle, rein or stirrup, set off at full gallop, wheeled her round, and brought her up at mid-career at a dead halt without the slightest difficulty. I felt rather like a man-half of a centaur, not a distinct being. This is due to the Arab system of breaking-in.

224 Raschid begged to be excused for a few minutes while he made preparations for our hunting trip. Ellis and I had brought a small kit-bag each, containing a change of clothes and toilet requisites, and I had with me a Winchester repeater, kindly lent by the American commanding officer; Ellis had brought an ordinary .303 Service rifle. One of the grooms appeared with Turkish saddles and bits for two of the horses; I had chosen the mare, and [492] Ellis a white stallion. The sheikh's horse, a fine black stallion, was fitted with a sheepskin saddle, the reins being decorated with long black and white tassels, with red cloth and feathers stuck over the head-stall, and a little short, frizzy black plume set between the ears. Raschid told me afterwards that he valued this horse at five thousand rupees.

Other servants brought out the folded tents, cooking utensils, rifles and food required for the expedition, and in a short time we were ready to start. The party consisted of Sheikh Raschid, Hussein, a secretary, Ellis and myself, a groom, and two heavily-armed guards, and we set off at a smart canter from the palace in the direction of Mahrid, with two of the sheikh's Saluki hunting dogs at our heels. In this part of the desert the surface was quite smooth and free of rocks, and riding was most pleasant. The heat was intense, however, and we had to wear sun-glasses, as the glare from the sand was most dazzling; apart from the usual short shrub there was little vegetation, and we had ridden for about five miles before we came to the large valley where the gazelle is found.

This valley is about four miles long and three miles wide, with steep, grass-covered banks on either side; the vegetation is lush, with camel grass, tamarisk, clover and wild flowers growing in profusion. Under a clump of neam trees we found a little stream trickling down from the rocks, and we tethered our horses to a branch while Raschid discussed a plan of campaign with Hussein and the groom. The gazelle, which travels in herds, comes to the valley to graze and drink when the sun is beginning to go down. Owing to their light fawn colouring, which makes them almost invisible in the sandy desert, they are conspicuous against the green vegetation, and seldom venture into the valleys in the daytime. They are quite small creatures, about three feet six inches in height, a little larger than the tiny Malayan barking-deer, with short, curved horns; the coat is a rich golden-brown, and the belly fawn to white.

Raschid directed the groom and the two guards, who are trained trackers and hunters, to take up vantage points on a *tel*, or hill, above the valley; from there they would have a wide view of the surrounding desert and of the valley itself. They went off on their horses, followed by the dogs, and were soon out of sight. While we were waiting Ellis and I cleaned our guns and took a photograph of Raschid and his friends. After nearly half an hour a low, whistling note, rather like the cry of a curlew, reached us. Raschid, informing us it was the signal that gazelle had been sighted, jumped up with alacrity and mounted his horse, telling us to follow him. We dashed up the side of the hill just in time to see a small herd of gazelle in the distance springing from rock to rock with amazing speed.

We spurred on our horses and, at Raschid's direction, spread out in fan-shape order so as to cover all sides of the valley; it was apparent that the herd was making for the open desert, so the beaters and dogs had gone ahead to try and round them off. Apparently they were successful although the gazelle were now invisible to our eyes, for the sheikh suddenly dismounted and we followed suit. After a short wait we heard the thunder of hoofs and, peeping from behind the screen of camel-thorn behind which we were concealed, we saw the herd, by now very much scattered, approaching in our direction.

They were about two hundred yards away when the leader suddenly wheeled, as though he had scented danger, and the whole herd began to turn off at right-angles to our hiding place. Raschid raised his rifle and fired, but there was so much dust that we did not see the result. I considered it to be a long shot and would not risk firing myself. When we stood up and looked around us the herd had disappeared.*

We rode back to the place where we had first halted and were

224 met by the trackers. To Raschid's delight they carried a fine buck on their saddles. It was a full-grown specimen nearly four feet high with exceptionally clear markings. The shot had struck the pelvic bone, glanced off and gone straight through the heart. The groom skinned the animal and then proceeded to cut up the meat into neat sections, putting the liver and offal on one side.

The sun was now beginning to sink towards the horizon although the light was still good and we set out for a final ride into a nearby ravine where the trackers had sighted another herd. They were too quick for us, however, being agile and sure-footed among the rocks, whereas our horses were unaccustomed to this terrain. My own mare stumbled twice and I was left behind. The herd was so perfectly camouflaged in the sand that it was extremely difficult to follow them beyond a hundred yards or so, although their course was betrayed by the dust which they kicked up. We fired several shots but the range was too great and we returned to our encampment just as the first stars were twinkling overhead.

The trackers had put up the tents and lit a fire of brushwood; although we were in a protected hollow it was extremely cold and we were glad of the blaze. Hussein lent me an *abbas*, which I wrapped around my bare arms and knees, and then busied himself with helping to prepare supper, which consisted of roast gazelle, boiled rice with ghee butter, chipatties, dates and coffee—a delicious meal. Hussein, who had brought his falcon-hawk with him, had gone off on a houbari hunt while we were after gazelle, and had caught a large cock. It belonged to the bustard family and looked rather like a small turkey, but we decided that roast gazelle was good enough for us, so it was handed over to the trackers.

The sheikh had given Ellis and I a small tent to ourselves. After supper we took a short stroll into the starlit valley while Raschid and his friends sat over the fire, smoking and discussing the hunt. The night was full of little cries and a distant, eerie howl that sounded like a wolf's. We turned in, covered ourselves with a goats'-hair blanket, and were soon fast asleep.

We rose at sunrise and washed in the stream, which was ice-cold. Before folding their tents our Arab hosts performed their toilets and said their prayers, kneeling in the sand towards the East; they then prepared breakfast. It was a simple meal of dates and camels' milk, and when we had finished it we mounted our horses and took the desert road to Sharjah.

000 A few days later Sheikh Raschid, Hussein, and the sheikh's

elderly uncle, Sheikh Mohammed of Baraimi, paid us a return visit at the Fort. Raschid brought with him the skin of the gazelle he had shot and presented it to me; he had had it dried and roughly dressed, and it made an excellent chair-back. Sheikh Mohammed, who belongs to the ancient Raschidi family which ruled Arabia, including Saudi Arabia and the Nejd, before King Ibn Saud's clan gained power, was about sixty years of age; but with his rheumy blue eyes, parchment face and wisp of a beard he looked at least eighty. He amused us very much by collecting the pips from the oranges we were eating; he said he wanted to take them back to his garden in Baraimi and plant them. He is a sheikh without a kingdom and lives in retirement in Baraimi, which is neutral territory, since he still believes that King Ibn Saud regards him as an old enemy and might have put him out of the way if he got a chance. Personally, I believe this to be an hallucination of senility, since the Raschidi are now scattered and without a vestige of power, their danger to Saudi Arabia being about as real as the Jacobite claim to the English throne.

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# CHAPTER XIII

437 HASSAN BIN AHMIDFA, the young pearl merchant, walked into my office at the Fort one morning and placed a little cardboard box on my desk. He helped himself to one of my cigarettes and smiled slyly as I opened the box. Under a layer of cotton wool there were a dozen gleaming white pearls. I took them out and placed them in the palm of my hand; they had a moon-white lustre, their surface reflected my face like a mirror, and there was a sheen of pink, green and gold in their texture.

'Sougini,' remarked Hassan, referring to their quality. That is, the second-best grade. He knew I was interested in picking up a few pearls if I could get them cheaply enough, and said he had managed to buy these from a friend. They were not of the finest quality, but the season had only just begun and one could only get the lower grades now.

I asked him how much they were. He shrugged and picked up a pear-shaped pearl, the size of a large pea, and balanced it in his hand.

'This weighs about eight *chaus*,' he said. 'You can have it for ninety rupees.'

I pushed the box away. 'Too much,' I answered. 'What do you take me for—a Maharajah?'

'It is worth much more, sahib,' he grinned. 'You can have the lot for three hundred rupees—but I will not sell this one for less than ninety.'

That was arithmetic I could not follow. The pearls all looked of similar quality to me, and I could have twelve of them for three hundred rupees; yet if I chose to buy one pearl I must pay ninety rupees. Again I examined them closely, but could detect no flaws. I took my cheque book from the drawer and paid him three hundred rupees; then we had a cup of coffee, English style, to seal the bargain. Hassan was perfectly honest and I have never regretted my purchase.

228 Pearls are the life-blood of the Persian Gulf, and more than half the populations of the towns and villages in Oman work at the

oyster beds during the season. In the little season, that is from 228
April to May, only pearls of inferior grade, including the dull and greyish *singabasi* pearls, are found, although there are exceptions. The Gulf on the Arabian side is lined with oyster-pearl beds, although the largest are at Bahrain where they can be seen from the air in the green, translucent water. There is a good bed a few miles north-west of Sharjah, and another beyond Ras-al-Khaimah. Persian Gulf pearls are the finest in the world; the geological formation of the sea bottom and the temperature and shallowness of the water are said to be favourable to the pearl-oyster's growth.

The history of the Arabian pearl fisheries is shrouded in the mists of time; no one knows when they were discovered or exported to other countries. It is likely that King Solomon's pearls came from the Gulf, and the Maharajah of Jodpur told me that Sharjah and Bahrain pearls were exported to India at least a thousand years ago. Next to oil they are the most important product of Arabia 228
although, unlike oil, they are subject to the dictates of fashion and 439
the market is apt to be temperamental. At one time fantastic prices were paid for a single pearl of matchless beauty, and millionaires gave hundreds of thousands of pounds for a necklace; with the discovery of the cultured pearl, however, the market began to drop and prices had only a temporary recovery to their former high rates owing to the war.

During the war practically no pearls were exported to Europe or the United States, and in England the one hundred per cent purchase tax caused them to lose favour with the public. Many women now prefer cultured pearls, with their fine lustre and even shape, to natural pearls which are difficult to match. Although a small quantity of Persian Gulf pearls was smuggled into Europe between 1939 and 1945 by ships and aircraft, the bulk of pearl stocks was exported to India, by way of the great market at Bombay. Prices were strictly controlled by the Bombay stockbrokers and it was actually cheaper to buy them in India than in the Gulf.

Large cargoes of pearls of every grade and quality were despatched regularly by air from Bahrain and Sharjah and I myself have handled a consignment valued at 200,000 rupees. It was contained in a drum the size of a four-pound cocoa tin, tightly wrapped in linen gauze and heavily sealed. The package, which weighed about eight pounds, contained several hundred pearls of finest quality and was heavily insured. These sealed tins formed a normal part of our daily cargo and the merchants used to queue

228 up outside the traffic office at the Fort just before the arrival of the
439 aircraft, to have them weighed, insured and locked up in the safe. Only one package was ever lost in transit, and in this case the insurance company paid the consignors compensation after investigations lasting three years.

228 Pearl fishing is the principal source of wealth among the people
434 on the Arabian side. It has been estimated that, if the supply of pearls were to fail—either owing to a disease among the oysters or sterility due to poisoning of the beds—the effect would be disastrous; the ports of the Trucial Oman Coast, which have no other resources, would practically cease to exist. The purchasing power of the inhabitants of the eastern coast of Arabia depends almost entirely on the pearl fisheries. In normal times about five thousand boats are employed in the industry, and more than seventy-four thousand operatives are engaged, not taking into account their families. Apart from the divers and boats' crews there are numerous capitalists, large and small, with their dependents whose funds are invested in the industry.

439 The value of the trade varies with the demand; in 1833 the annual value of pearls exported from the Gulf was only £300,000; in 1886 it was £400,000; in 1904 it was only £30,439—an extremely poor season—whilst prior to the war it reached the high figure of £1,500,000. Whether in the near future the annual turnover will again exceed the million mark depends on two factors: the dictates of fashion, and the condition of the oyster beds.

228 Hassan's family have been engaged in the pearling industry for three hundred years, and he knows as much about pearls as any man. He can judge the weight of a pearl exactly by balancing it in his hand, and estimate its texture by scraping its surface with his teeth.
437 Many merchants carry a tiny pair of jewellers' scales with them, for business deals are often carried out in the café or even in the street. Many are sold on commission by 'agents' and I have even had pearls offered to me by bearers, coolies and guards.

228 Hassan told me a great deal about the pearling industry, although
825 some of the Arab lore is hardly scientific. Thus, if there is a poor crop, the natives often ascribe this to shortage of rain. There is a tradition that the young and shell-less oysters come to the surface when it is raining, or the moon is full. The raindrops are the seeds of fertility, while the moon produces lustre; the rain is the father of a good pearl and the oyster the mother. It is a poetical notion, and no one has disproved its truth.

There are three kinds of pearl-producing oysters in the Gulf; 228 the *Mahharah*, the pearl-oyster proper, which is a most prolific source, which is found all over the Gulf from just below the low-water mark to eighteen fathoms; the *Zanniyah*, which are found in the vicinity of Ras-al-Khaimah; and the *Sadaifiyah*, which does not often yield pearls, but has been known to produce specimens of large and fine quality. The *Mahharahs* grow to about two inches in diameter and are collected when two or three years old. Pearl-oysters are prone to disease and the effects of submarine gases; some years ago a chemical disturbance occurred in the sea-bed off Bahrain. The sea became reddish and turbid, and oysters on some of the beds were found to be dead or diseased and produced no pearls.

The Arabs call the pearl *lulu*, and the Persians *marwarid*, and [192] although both of these terms are frequently heard in the trade, the commonest word in Oman is *qumash*, which also means piece-goods. According to Professor W. A. Herdman, one of the world's greatest experts, the formation of a pearl in an oyster is an abnormal occurrence, and is usually caused by the intrusion of a minute parasite—the opaque, white, globular larva of a cestode worm (*genus Tetrarhynous*). While it inhabits the body of the oyster it is from .07 to .53 millimetres long. It has a curious history. At first it is a free-swimming larva in the sea; at this stage it makes its way into the oyster where it is surrounded by a cyst of nacreous matter. If the oyster is not disturbed the cestode then passes into the file-fish, which preys upon the oyster, and reaches its final or adult stage in the shark or ray, by which in its turn the file-fish is devoured—a curious example of the vicious circle of life. Dr. Kelaart, who died in 1859, was the first scientist to connect the formation of pearls with vermin parasites.

Not all pearls are 'cyst' pearls, however; some are due to causes other than parasitic invasion. Also, only about one cyst in a hundred is pearl-bearing. There are 'muscle' pearls, the interiors of which contain a tiny calcareous concretion, and 'ampulla' pearls, the nucleus of which may be a grain of sand or some other inorganic particle. Another common variety is the so-called 'blister' pearl, attached to the interior of the oyster shell; it is formed by the irritation caused by boring animals which work through from the outside. These can hardly be considered as pearls and have little value.

Pearls vary greatly in colour, shape and quality, yet these are

228 factors which govern their value, in addition to specific gravity. The principal colours are white, pink, yellow or gold, blue, grey and black. Black pearls (called by the Arabs 'dead' pearls) are usually dull and of impure colour; they generally crack after a year or more. Few black pearls of high value have been found in the Gulf, the finest varieties coming from Mexico. All the black pearls that I saw were no larger than seed pearls. Parti-coloured pearls are not uncommon; they are mostly black or brownish, with white or bluish variegations.

Besides pearls of spherical or pear-shaped form, symmetrical probably because they have developed in a soft medium, malformed pearls of various types occur in the Persian Gulf as they do elsewhere. Of these the commonest are the hemispherical 'button' pearl, flattened on one side, perhaps by contact with the shell, and the hollow, irregularly shaped 'blister' pearl. Small pearls generally, whether round or deformed, are called 'seed' pearls, which is an English term. They are sold by bulk, and are used for grinding into medicinal powders, or as decorative beading for women's dresses in India and Persia.

The experts of the Persian Gulf assert that the largest, whitest, heaviest and most perfect pearls are obtained in deep water, while the shallow beds, though prolific, yield pearls of less specific gravity and invariably tinged with a shade of some colour. This stain of colour they attribute to the influence of the light of the sun, and they hold that there is a tendency to distortion in pearls grown between islands and the mainland, and that deep water is favourable to perfect sphericity as well as to lustre and to the other qualities
228 which give the pearl its value. The Arabs estimate the fineness
485 of pearls by an imaginary number of 'coats'. They say that the Karachi pearl has only one coat, the Ceylon pearl three, the Red Sea and Sokotrah pearl five, while the ordinary pearl of the Persian Gulf has no less than seven. The truth is, of course, that the pearl forms on the shell in layers or skins, rather like an onion. Pearls can be skinned, and a poor-looking specimen may be found to have a perfect interior.

Pearls exceeding thirty grains Troy in weight are seldom obtained in the Gulf, and the smaller sizes are numerous in proportion to their smallness. One of the finest Persian Gulf pearls on record was found in 1867 in sixteen fathoms of water near the island of Sheikh Shu'aib; it was purchased by a merchant for 15,000 Qrans, sold in Paris the following year for £8,000, and

was eventually purchased by a Baniyah and brought to India to 228
make an eye for an idol. In 1899 a native of Mumzar, a subject 485
of the Sultan of Oman, found a valuable pearl which he sold to the Sheikh of Sharjah for £2,000. This gave rise to litigation lasting for several years and almost ended in war between the Sultan and the Sheikh. Eventually the pearl reached Bombay where it was valued at 400,000 rupees. The matter was referred to the Arab court, or *Majlis*, which gave judgment in favour of the Sultan, ruling that he was entitled to the net price received by the owners. The pearl, after remaining unsold for some time in London, was brought back to Bombay and disposed of there for 1,000,000 rupees. The Sultan's share should have been 30,000 rupees but, owing to the cost of litigation and mortgages, he had to content himself with 12,000 rupees.

Hassan was one of many of the Arab pearl merchants who 442
make a living by acting as brokers or commission agents; a few own boats and trade direct with India, but the most important men in the pearl trade are the Indian brokers or buyers with headquarters in Bombay. The most influential broker in Oman was Jam Shan, a large, dignified Parsee whose house in Dubai I frequently used to visit. In appearance he was very like the Aga Khan, and was reputed to be enormously wealthy. Before the war he used to travel extensively to Europe and America, and had connexions with Cartier in Paris and London. Persian Gulf pearls sold by Mr. Jam Shan to Cartier were purchased by the Duchess of Windsor for £20,000, and a single pearl which was originally bought for £6,000 was finally sold to Miss Barbara Hutton, the American heiress, for £15,000.

Jam Shan had a single room in his house which he used as an office. He and his assistants used to sit on the floor counting and sorting the hundreds of thousands of pearls (some as tiny as a pinhead) which the merchants brought to him in bagfuls. Exceptionally large and fine pearls, of 30 grains Troy and upwards, he
used to buy singly. There is no recognized method of assessing [135]
their value, except by the lustre and sheen. The intermediate and smaller sizes, which form the staple of the pearl trade, are valued according to size, weight, colour and shape. Their valuation demands great technical knowledge. Medium pearls are assorted into size by being passed through a series of perforated bowls, called *tasah*, made of brass or copper, which fit into one another,

442 so as to form a nest. Some pearl dealers keep as many as forty-five [804] sets, graduated according to their perforations. The weighing of pearls is a most complicated matter, but very simply a pearl is rated in *chaus*, a Bombay measure, which is one three hundred and thirtieth part of a *maskal*, which is made up in turn by 100 *dokras*. A *chau* is really a unit of value as well as a weight, and changes according to the number of pearls being valued together. Thus, two pearls, weighing exactly half a third of a pearl, would not be estimated so highly in *chaus* as the single pearl. The finest pearl I saw in Jam Shan's collection was valued at £8,000, or nearly £73 a *chau*.

228 If the valuation of pearls is a complicated affair the financial 463 organization of the industry is even more so. The industry teems with merchants, brokers, middlemen, agents, and moneylenders. First the pearl fleet has to be financed before it can go to sea, and money has to be provided for the crews and divers. This is [452] advanced partly by the owners of the boats and partly by a special class of moneylenders called *Musaqqams*, who demand ten or twenty-five per cent interest. Every boat is commanded by a captain, or *Nakhuda*, who receives a percentage of the catch; sometimes he is the owner of the boat. Next in importance to him is the *Ghasah*, or diver, followed by the *Siyub*, or hauler, the *Radhif*, or extra hand, and the *Walaid*, or apprentice, whose duty it is to catch fish, cook, look after the pipes and coffee, and attend to other minor duties.

The *ghasah*, whose only work is to dive, are mostly poor Arabs and free negroes or slaves, and their efficiency depends more on their skill and daring than on the strength of their constitution. A [567] slave diver who is not afraid to enter deep and muddy water containing weeds is ordinarily valued at considerably over a thousand rupees. The *siyub*, whose duties are merely to manage the boat and to lower and pull up the divers, are usually landsmen whom age or other causes have obliged to abandon diving. The total crew of a pearl boat varies from ten to forty men, the average [50] number being sixteen. All sorts of boats are used for pearling, even jollyboats being fitted out for the purpose, but the majority are sambuks, batils, bagarahs and shuais. A large boat, holding forty men, will cost 30,000 rupees or more to construct and fit out.

228 There are two principal seasons for pearl diving: the *Ghaus-al-Bard*, or cold-diving season, which lasts from April to May, and the *Ghaus-al-Kabir*, or 'great diving', beginning in June after the end

of the Shamal wind and lasting until the end of September. The 228
beginning of this season is known as the *Rakbah*, and the closing as
*Quffal*. At Sharjah the second season sometimes lasted until late
in October, although the seas usually begin to get cold at this time
of the year.

In addition to the seasons for pearling at sea there is also a winter season for shore operations, known as the *Mujannah*. Pearl fishing by this method consists in wading in the shallows along the coast when the tide is out, and those who take part in it ordinarily return to their homes at night. The pearls obtained in the *Mujannah* are usually small and discoloured, although the pearl which caused the dispute between the Sultan of Oman and the Sheikh of Sharjah was found by a wader at Kumzar.

Until recent years the pearl fishers had neither charts nor 502
compasses, but they are extremely expert in finding their way
to any bank they wish to reach; in their primitive navigation
they are guided by the sun and stars as well as by bearings from the
land when in sight, and also by the colour and depth of the sea
and the nature of the bottom. The choice of a bank is limited by 228
the diving powers of the divers. Eight fathoms is an ordinary
depth, and twelve perhaps the greatest at which work can be
carried on without discomfort. Beyond this the strain is too
great to be endured long and may result in fatal accidents. Before
entering the sea the *ghais* strips off his clothes, places a pair of horn
pincers on his nose to compress the nostrils, plugs his ears with
cotton wool or bees' wax, and puts on leather finger-stalls to protect
his fingers against abrasions. He also attaches a small bag of coir
matting round his neck or waist. He is lowered into the sea by
means of a long rope with a noose in which he places his foot, and
a stone or lead sinker weighing ten or more pounds.

On reaching the bottom the diver removes his foot from the noose and proceeds to grope along the bed with one hand and one foot, using the second foot to propel himself and the disengaged hand to collect oysters. It is said that oysters are generally found open-mouthed, but close up when approached. When he cannot hold his breath any longer the diver signals to the *siyub* by jerking the rope and is immediately hauled up. A diver normally remains below the surface for forty or seventy-five seconds, although one minute is the average; in favourable weather he will make as many as fifty plunges in a day. It is rarely that a diver is attacked by a shark (*jarjur*) or dog-fish, but a few years ago an unusual number

228 of sharks made their appearance off the banks and attacked nearly thirty divers, two of whom were killed under water, the others being rescued in a precarious condition.

466 Diving is carried out every day during fine weather, work
228 commencing an hour after sunrise and ceasing an hour before sunset. The interval between the early morning prayer and the start of diving is spent by the crews in opening the oysters collected on the previous day. This is done with crooked knives called *mufaliq*, under the superintendence of the *Nakhuda*, who weighs and registers the pearls. The stench arising from this operation must be smelt to be believed. Before they start work the divers are allowed a light meal of half a pound of dates and a few cups of coffee each. Once they have entered the water work is continued without intermission until *Dhuhr*, about 2 p.m., when it is suspended for prayers, a few cups of coffee, and an hour's rest. After *Maghrib*, or evening prayers, the divers take a substantial meal of fish, rice and dates and then, after a little smoking and coffee-drinking, retire to rest for the night.

228 Divers sometimes suffer from the stings of the devil-fish, and when there are many of these about they wear a long white shirt to protect them from their embraces. Although a very fatiguing occupation, diving is not particularly injurious to the health, and is
[164] practised even by old men. In some cases it gives rise to diseases of the respiratory system and to deafness. Skin disease is a common ailment amongst divers, who guard against it by rubbing themselves with *jafi*, a concoction made from the inner shell of the Persian
[157] acorn. Senna leaves and other herbs are taken in cases of sickness; but if serious illness occurs, recourse is had to cautery with a hot iron.

228 Pearl diving is nearly always an hereditary occupation. The
463 reason for this is purely economic. During the off-season the
452 divers have to provide for their families and are often too lazy to undertake any other kind of work, although a few take up fishing. Being an extravagant class, they soon spend the money they have made from diving, and are obliged to borrow from the *Nakhuda*. They are seldom able to repay this debt, the interest on which accumulates, and the only way in which it can be repaid is by means of annual instalments deducted from their diving pay and bonuses. Thus a family of divers, to the second or third generation, may be indebted to a *Nakhuda* or his heirs and, unless the diver finds an alternative means of repaying the debt, he must continue diving to the end of his days, and his son after him.

The *Nakhuda* himself is very seldom free from debt, for the 228
expenses of fitting out and provisioning the boats and of retaining 452
the services of capable divers and making them advances, often 686
as much as 3,000 rupees per season, make him equally dependent
on the *Musaqqams*, or moneylenders. Should a *Nakhuda* be unable 698
to pay off his debts, the *Salifat-al-Ghaus*, or 'Diving Court', a tribunal set up by the sheikh of the district, may order his boats to be sold and his divers to be handed over to the creditor, although his house and other personal property is exempt from seizure. Usually, however, the court fixes an annual instalment for the discharge of the debt, and the *Nakhuda* is then free to form relations with another *Musaqqam*, if he can find one willing to finance him in these circumstances. These rules, although drastic, are very necessary to protect the pearling industry from financial loss.

The diving court has other functions, one of which is to enforce 698
the 'laws' of the industry as regards the engagement of labour, 228
rates of interest, supervision of taxes due to the sheikhs, and the
maintenance of a standard of quality of the pearls sold in the open 695
market. Dealers who charge excess prices for pearls, or who pass 656
bad or spurious pearls for those of first quality, are severely reprimanded or even suspended from trading, whilst the man who dares to bring a false or 'cultured' pearl into the Gulf is liable to be outlawed by the sheikh.

It is interesting to watch the brokers haggling over a heap of 437
gleaming pearls in the market. It would take the average European 442
several minutes to work out a price, but the Arab merchant, even when otherwise illiterate, is usually a clever mathematician and benefits by the fluctuations of market rates and by the discrepancies of the weighing appliances in use in the Gulf. Some experts, generally sea-going *Tawwashes*, or dealers, profess a power to distinguish roughly the depth of water and even the particular neighbourhood from which a pearl shown to them may have been obtained; thus they assert that pearls from the banks near Bahrain are marked by greater lustre, and those from banks further northward by greater 'solidity'. They all possess an uncanny ability to sum a pearl up at a glance, and the success of the individual trader depends chiefly upon his power to appraise the relative fineness of pearls belonging to the same class, and he has no set rules to assist his judgment.

The largest pearls are sent to India to be sold individually by 439
the *chau*; but, in the assortment of the remainder into packets— 442
435

442 each packet containing pearls of the same class, but not necessarily
435 of the same size—the ingenuity of the dealer finds further scope, for each of such packets, if skilfully made up, commands a higher price than the pearls comprising it would obtain if disposed of separately. Dealers are consequently averse from breaking up their packets and a fancy price must generally be paid for a single pearl selected from a packet of which the remainder are not taken.

651 The sheikhs of the Arab littoral derive considerable revenue from the pearl fisheries, but only as a means of taxes imposed on their subjects or on traders resident in their territories. The Trucial Oman sheikhs are also entitled to receive a share in the sale price of any pearl worth £50 or more which may have been found by one of their subjects, but no particular share is specified. The tax is called *Taraz*, and is sometimes assessed at the rate of one diver's share for each boat, and the sheikh is supposed to provide out of this revenue the services of watchmen to guard the towns and villages while the able-bodied males are absent. The *Taraz* is a poll tax on operatives and the *Nob*, also collected by the sheikhs, a tax on boats. Much confusion is caused by irregularity in collection of the taxes, the people always endeavouring to pay as little as possible and the sheikhs to take as much as they can, and that in advance. It is not surprising that the profession of tax-collector is highly unpopular in Arabia.

228 The rights of the pearl fisheries are very jealously guarded and
656 the operatives are protected by the British Government. Only Arabs and the subjects of the sheikhs are allowed to undertake pearl diving in the Persian Gulf, and foreigners, diving suits, and any form of mechanical device are strictly barred. The effect of competition with Europeans furnished with scientific appliances and the use of deep-sea dredging, would tend to destroy the colonies from which the oysters upon the shallow beds accessible to native divers are recruited. Moreover, the appearance of European rivals would arouse great animosity on the part of the Arabs, who regard the fisheries as their common but exclusive inheritance, and for this reason alone the British Government has always opposed foreign entry—even that of British subjects—into the Gulf pearling industry.

228 In spite of Government opposition, however, the lure of the
477 pearl trade has proved too great to prevent attempts by foreigners to compete in the industry, and several syndicates have been formed in the past with a view to exploiting the beds. Permission to

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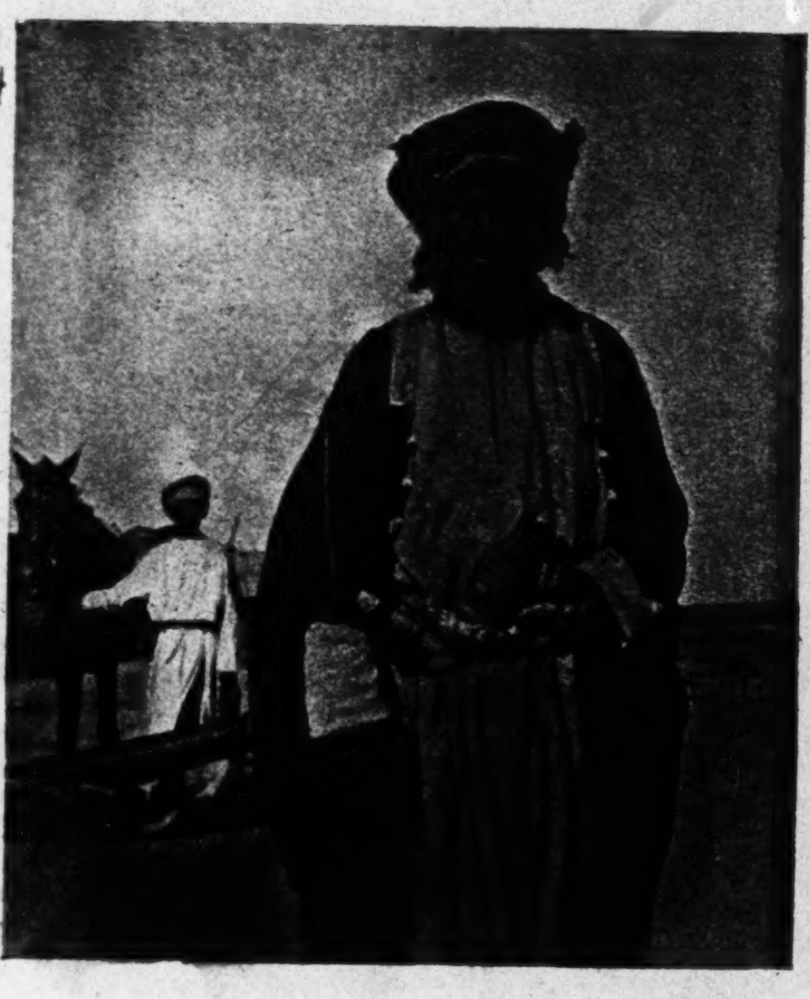

Hussein, Wazir to the Sheikh of Al 'Ajman, wearing the gold State dagger in his girdle

following p. 140 (a).

**2: O'Shea G-3 (1944-1945) 1947 MK4 Trucial Oman MK4**

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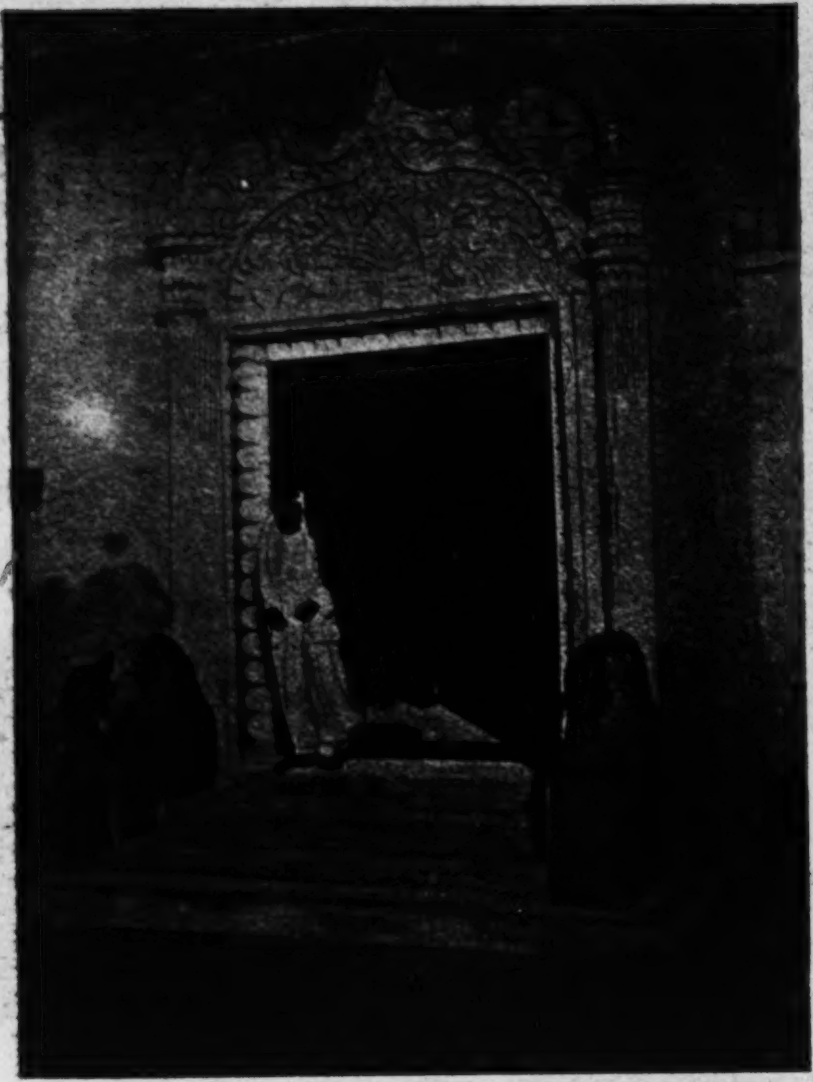
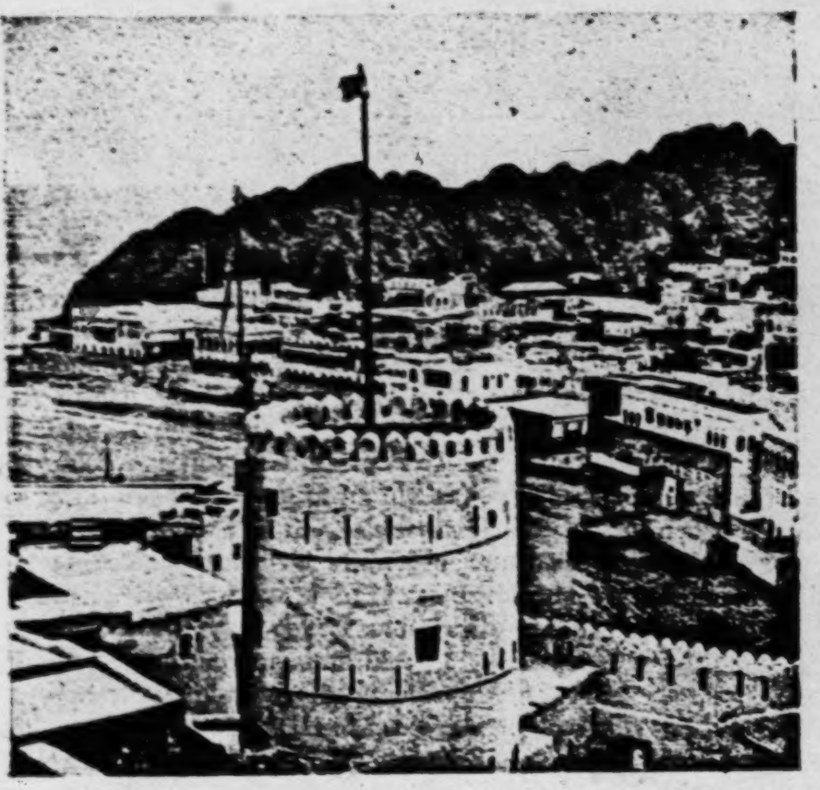


The Khan Bahadur bin Razzak, British Residency Agent, Trucial Oman, standing in front of the magnificent Persian doorway of his house in Sharjah

following p 140 (b)



The harbour at Ras-al-Khaimah, a stronghold of pirates and slave-traders in the 19th century. The Sheikh's palace is in the foreground

following p 140(c)

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A reservoir at Djaidh, part of the irrigation system for the date plantations

following p. 140 (d)

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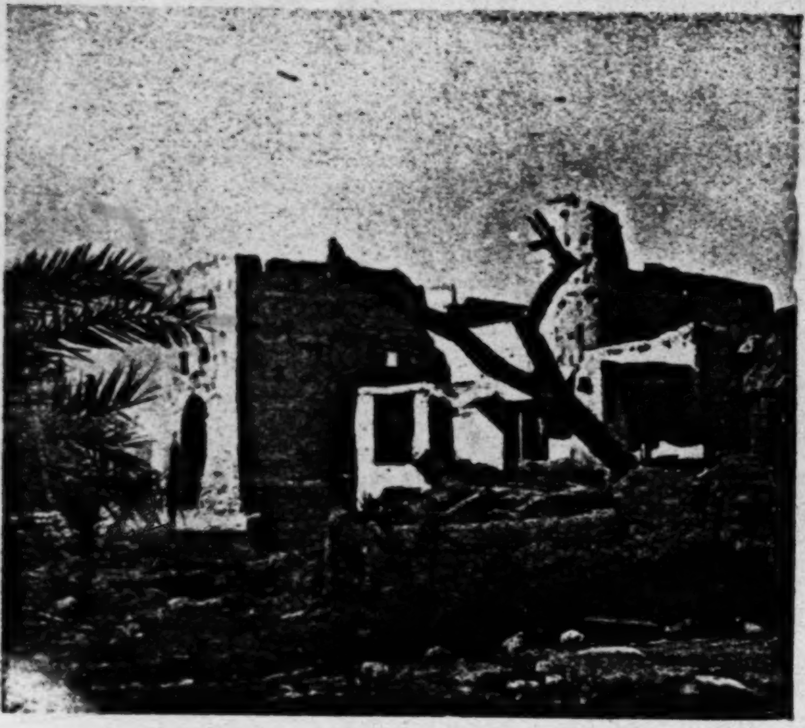
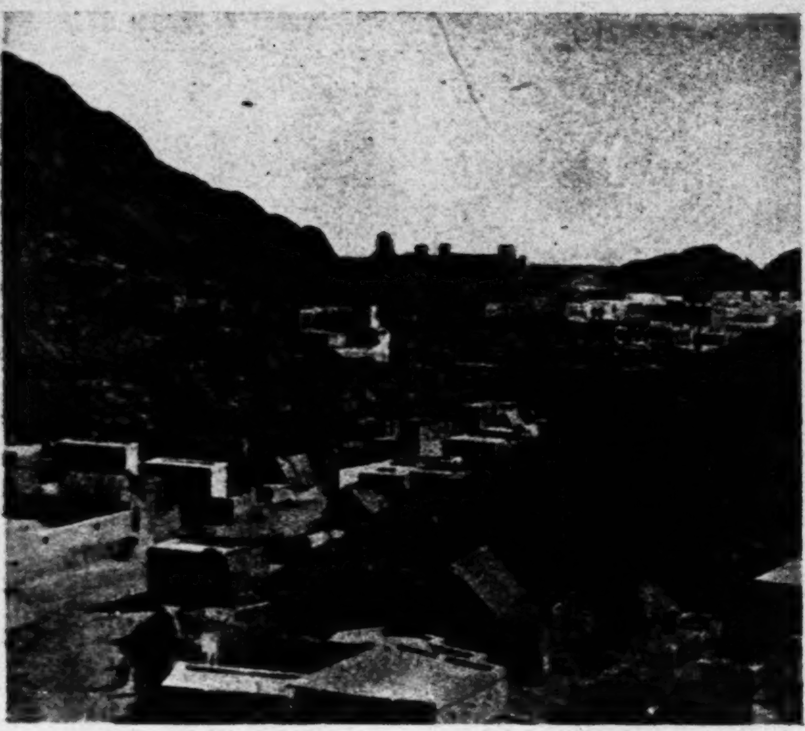


Ruins of the deserted town of Wahaida, on the caravan route to the Rub-al-Khali

following p 140 (e)



Ruins of the 'Lost City' built on a hill-top at Umm-al-'Amad, in the Rub-al-Khali desert, showing deserted 'modern' houses built by later inhabitants

following p 140 (f).

291

Hamid bin Rahman, a guide employed by the Sheikh of Al 'Ajman, who helped me to reach the 'Lost City.'

following p. 140 (8)

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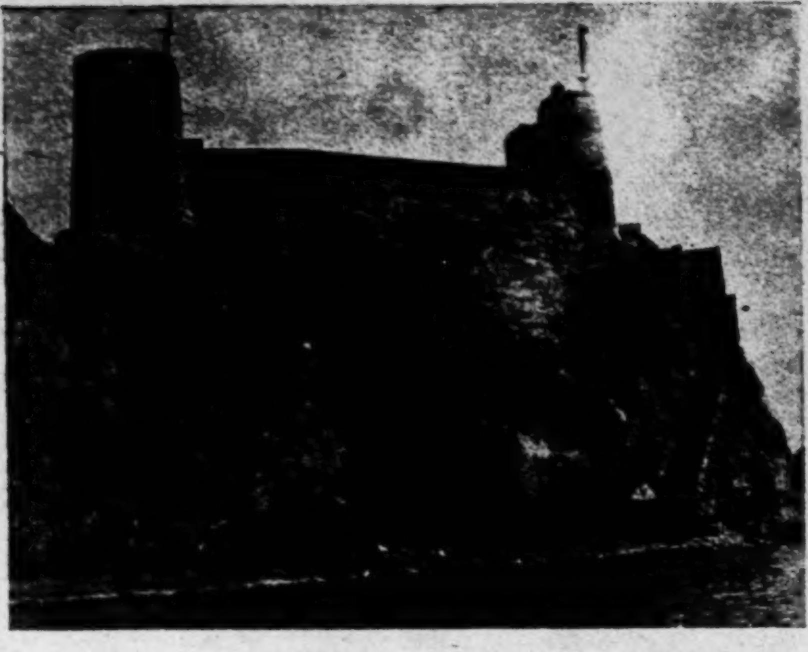

An ancient fortress in the Western Hajar mountains, once the home of the Sheikh of Kalba

following p 140 (h)

228
477
operate has been refused in every case, and ships which have ventured into the Gulf with the object of sending down divers in secret, have been impounded and their takings, if any, confiscated. In 1882 a steamer, the *Johnstone Castle*, was chartered by a Bombay syndicate and proceeded without official sanction to the Bahrain pearl banks. News of the expedition soon reached the Political Resident at Bushire, and he despatched a Government vessel to arrest the steamer. The total gains of the party during the five days that they had been at work were represented by only twenty-three small seed pearls.

Numerous abortive attempts to work the beds with modern diving apparatus have been made since then, and in 1900 an Indian merchant actually had a trading agreement with the Sheikhs of Abu Dhabi and Ras-al-Khaimah to operate in their territories, but the British authorities cancelled the arrangement on the grounds that it would arouse hostility amongst the pearling community. A year later the *Selika*, a small Belgian steam yacht, paid a visit to the Gulf. After leaving Muscat she disappeared for several weeks, reappearing suddenly at Bahrain. The crew admitted that they had spent most of the time in the neighbourhood of the pearl banks, and it was afterwards ascertained that on their return to Europe they had disposed of a quantity of small pearls.

In the same year the *Daily Express* announced that an influential German syndicate were negotiating with the Turkish 'Porte' for a monopoly of the pearl fisheries along the Ottoman shores of the Red Sea and Persian Gulf, with a view to working them by scientific methods. The British Ambassador at Constantinople took the matter up with the Turkish Government, who denied all knowledge of the negotiations, and nothing further was heard of the syndicate or their scheme. In more recent years the Sponge Exploration Syndicate Limited, a company with a nominal capital of £1,000, registered in London, but directed chiefly by foreigners of various nationalities, attempted to exploit the beds. This company, which described its business as that of 'sponge, pearl and coral finders', unsuccessfully tried to obtain sanction from the Foreign Office to fish in the Gulf.

No assistance was given to them, but they succeeded in procuring a fifty years' concession and monopoly for sponge fishing in Persian waters. Under this authority some diving was carried on by Greek employees of the syndicate.

Prior to the 1914–18 war a Parisian jeweller, Madame Nattan,

228 came to Bahrain for the pearl season and remained there from the
477 beginning of August until the end of October. She had some difficulty in establishing relations with the local dealers, who were prejudiced against carrying on business with a woman, but eventually she succeeded in buying pearls on the spot to the amount of 40,000 rupees (£3,000).

442 There is nothing to prevent anyone going to the Persian Gulf
181 and buying pearls from the dealers, but there is very little likelihood that he will make a profit out of the transaction. The Arab is an extremely wily person and unless the greenhorn is lucky enough to obtain the friendly advice of an honest merchant, such as Hassan bin Ahmidfa he will, as likely as not, find himself saddled with rubbish. A life-study of pearls is necessary in order to be able to appraise their value, and even a Hatton Garden merchant who paid a visit to Bahrain or Sharjah would have to know something of the Arab character as well as of pearls. A woman singer who came to Sharjah with a concert party showed me a pearl necklace she had purchased in Bahrain; she told me she had paid £25 for it and seemed overjoyed with her 'bargain'. She lent the pearls to me to have them valued locally, and I showed them to Hassan. He eyed them with a look of contempt and handed them back.

'*Singabasi*,' he muttered, an Arabic word used to signify the bluish pearls of low value which have the silvery sheen of ball bearings. 'They are worth perhaps thirty rupees.'

# BOOK FOUR

## *THE RUB-AL-KHALI*

## CHAPTER XIV

SHORTLY after my visit to the Sheikh of Ajman I was taken ill 000 with a severe attack of fever. It came on suddenly while I was at dinner, and lasted for several days. Each attack, which usually occurred just after sunset, left me prostrate and delirious, with a temperature of 104°. The Station Medical Officer could not diagnose the ailment; at first he thought it was malaria but a blood test proved this not to be the case, nor was it sand-fly fever. On the third day an old and ragged coolie, whose principal task was to empty the slops and clean the lavatories, came into my room and knelt beside the bed.

I was too weak to remonstrate, but my bearer later told me that Abdul had been praying for my recovery. The next day I felt well though very weak, and in the afternoon I was strong enough to get up and dress for tea. Old Abdul was a very pious Mohammedan and he had a curious history. Of mixed Arab, Negro and Persian blood, he was sold in the slave market when four years old. His master was not unkind but made him work hard and beat him occasionally. When Abdul was twenty years of age an English official purchased his freedom for five hundred rupees and took him to India. There he became an office coolie and remained until 1925, when he experienced a longing to return to the Gulf. He held numerous office jobs in Bahrain until he joined British Overseas Airways (then Imperial Airways) in 1929.

At that time the British Government was experiencing political difficulties with the Iran Government, and it was decided to abandon the airfields at Jask and Bundar Abbas on the Persian side and build an airfield at Sharjah. The move was made in rather a hurry as the Persians had become extremely hostile, and many valuable documents were left behind. Abdul volunteered to return by boat and bring them back. Requisitioning a native *bagarah* he

000 sailed it across the Gulf single-handed, landed at Jask at night and, eluding the Persian guards, crept into the offices. He made several trips back and forth in this manner, carrying armfuls of files, books, papers and records. Finally he set fire to the huts and ran down to the shore under fire from the sentries' rifles. Abdul returned in safety to Sharjah and presented the Station Manager with about half a ton of 'bumph' for which he had risked his life. If there were such a thing as a Civil Servant's Medal I feel sure old Abdul is entitled to it.

I decided to spend the following week as a convalescent, and handed over my principal duties to McGilvray, the red-headed South African Traffic Officer. One afternoon, when a Sunderland flying-boat was due to make a landing at Dubai, I decided to accompany the party. It was a hot and uncomfortable drive, but it was cool inside the rest-house and Haider soon made us iced tea with lemon, and produced some delicious sausage-rolls. We were just building a small control tower on the roof, and it was pleasant to climb to the top and sit in a deck chair; there was invariably a fresh sea breeze on the roof, and one had a magnificent view of the distant mountains at Ras-al-Khaimah, seventy miles away and of the blue-green creek and the town of Dubai beyond.

136 Whilst the flying-boat discharged its passengers I wandered along the creek shore and picked up some fine specimens of shells, including mother-o'-pearl, and pieces of branch-like coral. This coral is pure white and delicately perforated, resembling Honiton
[32] lace; sometimes pink mollusc shells are found adhering to it, and these are used by the Arabs as pin trays. The shore is littered with rocks, garbage, bones and refuse from the boats, and occasionally one comes across the carcase of a donkey. Hundreds of crabs dart into their mud-holes as one approaches, and the rocks swarm
137 with tiny lizards of a peculiar grey colour. It is surprising to find flowers growing amongst the decayed sea-wrack, but I have dug up several sea poppies and desert lilies—a yellow-flowered plant resembling a hyacinth—which were successfully transplanted in the Fort garden.

000 I watched the flying-boat take off on its long journey to Karachi, and joined the coxswain and the others at the end of the little jetty. Jock asked me if I would like a trip down the creek to Dubai in the launch, so we crowded into the small [redacted] and began to chug
361 down-stream at a pleasant twelve knots. D[redacted] is a much more attractive town than Sharjah, and about twice as large; palm and

361 coco-nut trees grow down to the shore on either side of the creek, on
the southern side of which is a palm-mat 'summer palace' belonging
to the Sheikh of Ras-al-Khaimah, now used to house a discarded
wife. The town is divided by the creek into two sections—Dubai
proper, where the merchants and wealthier classes live, and Dera,
the fishermen's quarter. We made for the latter and moored
alongside a primitive wooden jetty beside which large pearling
dhows were undergoing a careen.

342 The streets of Dera are filthy in the extreme, the inhabitants
living in hovels roofed with palm-matting supported by wooden
joists. The only presentable house was the coral and mortar
residence of Ali, the Anglo-Persian Company's agent in Dubai;
we stopped here for a few minutes and had a cup of tea made with
438 condensed milk. The Arabs, whose chief occupation is pearl
164 diving, fishing, shipbuilding and wool-weaving, were ragged and
unkempt; many had sores on their legs and arms, and appeared
to be suffering from eye infections. Many of the children were
364 badly pock-marked. The stench of refuse, stale fish, camel dung
and rotting food was unbearable, and attracted clouds of flies.

144 One noticed a variety of racial types. The Omani Arabs
predominated, but one saw also fair-skinned Persians, Bedouins,
Sunussi, and negroid types who were obviously ex-slaves. Many
of the Arabs, thin-bearded men with hawk-like noses, looked more
443 villainous than any I have seen. We strolled through the bazaar,
but the shops were small and untidy and displayed goods of inferior
quality. In several of the shops I noticed ancient iron safes, gaudily
painted, which were of English manufacture and had obviously
159 been taken from merchantmen by the pirates. There is little doubt
that most of the inhabitants of Dera, a vicious, sullen crowd, would
gladly have returned to piracy had they been given half a chance.
142 In contrast to their cruel, sardonic faces around us, I was struck
by the beauty of some of the children who swarmed at our side,
feeling our clothes and touching our hands. A little girl of nine
or ten attracted my attention; her perfectly formed features, luminous
brown eyes and Grecian lips made me sigh for a pencil and
sketchbook. The little boys were delightful creatures too, with
laughing eyes and white, even teeth.

363 The streets were extremely dark, with high walls on one side
and palm-matting completely covering them like a roof, whilst
443 the 'road' was a quagmire of mud and camel dung. Six shops
out of every ten exhibited panniers of dried fruits and cereals, figs,

443 dates, ground nuts, spices and ghee butter. One shop was devoted
[276] entirely to hubble-bubble pipes and we watched an old Arab
carving a pipe stem. The stems, which are of bamboo, are fitted
with a brass ring near the top to form a lip for the smoker, the body
of the stem being delicately covered with gold and silver thread.
The second stem, through which the air escapes, is of plain bamboo,
engraved with Arabic designs which are carved with a red-hot
knife, and then coloured with indigo. The bowl, made of unglazed
pottery, has a slender neck flared at the top. These pipes cost
about ten rupees each, the stems being a rupee extra.

Some of the shops are well stocked with canned goods and
haberdashery from the Indian market, and one saw shelves full
of sewing cotton, buttons, metal polish, brass lamps, and cheap
cloth. A common sight is raw cotton, still in its pods, which is
gathered from trees in the interior; untreated hemp and tobacco
leaves, crudely dried. There were few carpets, and those we saw
441 were of indifferent quality. A few of the merchants appeared to be
well-off and one or two had robes of coloured silk, edged with
gold thread. They had noble, intelligent faces, and one patriarch,
with a snow-white beard and spotless linen *abbas*, looked out of
place in that ill-assorted crowd. A large sapphire ring sparkled
on his finger and his long, thin hands were those of an artist. One
181 must be careful not to judge the Arab by Western standards, since
dirt and insanitation are not abhorrent to them as they are to us.
Even a cultured and fastidious Arab may have manners which
would be out of place in a London drawing-room.

562 Apart from little girls up to ten years of age, we saw very few
women, and they were heavily veiled. We walked to the little
396 quay, which was clustered with dhows and rowing boats and
501 watched the intense activity of shipbuilding and repairing that was
in progress. The seams of the hulls are caulked with raw cotton
and then covered with pitch, and the bottoms are painted with
lime mixed with shark's oil, a good preservative. The upper
part of the hull, above the water line, is also varnished with fish
oil. Some of the sails are enormous and stretch from bows to
stern, giving the dhows great speed on the water. This is
necessary since they have to cover great distances, especially in the
pearling season, when they may have to sail seventy miles in a
single day to reach the beds.

501 There was quite a chilly breeze as we entered a ferryboat and
were rowed across the creek, although the sun was still high above

the horizon. It took about eight minutes to cross the creek, which 501 is half a mile wide at this point, but the boats are heavy and clumsily made and the oars consist of rectangular boards nailed to a large pole. The boat was run on to the muddy, steep shore and we jumped out, picking our way amongst garbage and squatting Arabs.

The houses in Dubai Town, at the western and south side of 342 the creek, are larger and more imposing than those in Dera; many of them have square towers and Persian ventilators, with verandas of Moorish design which lean dangerously away from the walls in cantilever fashion. The town is built upon the sides of a sloping 361 hill, with a sandstone foundation, and the houses are curiously stepped or terraced; one walks along a road to find it is the roof of a house and, peering over the edge, sees another street below. The top of the hill is dominated by the sheikh's palace—a sandstone shell, no longer occupied, although the ruler's flag flies from the main tower. The Sheikh of Dubai lives in a walled house on the far side of the creek, overlooking the harbour and the sea.

The houses in the residential section of Dubai are large and 342 clean, with high white walls and magnificent doorways of Moorish design. Some of the richer merchants' dwellings have small streets within their walls, with twisting alleys, steep flights of stone stairs and dark, cool rooms leading from the covered courtyards. One has the strange feeling in Dubai of being indoors all the time; 361 this is because all the streets are roofed with palm-matting and one seldom sees the sky. It was rather like a visit to an Arab village at the British Exhibition in Wembley, except that this was the real thing, with all the aromas and colours of reality. Yet Dubai is 443 remarkably clean for an Arab town, and some of the open booths and shops have first-class wares for sale. I have bought leather travelling bags here—made by native craftsmen—which were as handsome and well-made as anything at Fortnum & Mason's, and the Persian shops have stocks of modern and antique carpets which would please the most fastidious collector or decorator.

In one of the smaller houses on the highest terrace we found Mr. 441 Jam Shan, the pearl merchant, who invited us into his dark and tiny sitting-room office. Both he and his sons wore shirts and trousers, smoked English cigarettes, and conversed in quite good Cockney, as they had spent many years in London. With the radio blaring an Indian song they sat bare-legged on the floor and resumed their work of sorting and counting the heap of pearls

441 before them. Jam Shan senior, whose family has been engaged in the pearl business for more than a hundred years, told me amusing stories of his visits to Paris where he once had an office in the Rue de la Paix.

From an old iron safe he produced two coarse linen bags, tied with string and sealed with wax, and undid the string. One bag contained seed pearls of little value or beauty; the other bulged with hundreds of pearls of every shape and size—yellow, black, pink and moon-white. One, which he placed in the palm of my hand, was priced at £50. It was a perfect sphere, of a delicate rose-pink, lit with a hundred facets of light, soft and lustrous, like moonlight on a desert pool. Its incomparable sheen mirrored every movement and, on looking into its depths one could see hues of red and mauve. To match this pearl for a necklace Jam Shan told me, might take take him three years; but when it was complete it would be worth a fortune. There was none other like it in the collection, although there were hundreds with delicate hues and lustres, from pale silvery pink to yellow-gold.

We declined the tea and rice cakes which were offered to us, and as Jam Shan bowed us out of the room he apologized for his poor collection and promised to show us some rarities the next time we called. It was ironical to think that a mere handful of those gleaming balls of nacre, manufactured by the oyster to cover an irritation, would keep a family in luxury and comfort for several
[51] years. The expenses of the average Arab household, in the poorer quarter, are about £50 a year—the value of a single pearl! And yet Mr. Jam Shan and others like him, who could find a million pounds with ease if they required it, live so simply themselves that £250 would probably cover their personal and household expenses per annum.

[47] Our next visit was to the home of Basil Lermitte, of the Petroleum Concession. This house, which is situated on the waterfront, is one of the most imposing in Dubai. It is only two storeys high but has an enormous frontage and the verandas and ornamental Persian columns on the façade are richly painted in red and blue. Two armed, uniformed guards examined our credentials at the gateway, and then conducted us through the open courtyard to Mr. Lermitte's quarters; the courtyard was a blaze of colour, bougainvillea and roses growing in profusion. There was a little marble fountain in the centre, and along the walls were peach, pomegranate and fig trees.

Lermitte received us on the veranda. Tea was already laid 000 on a modern oak table that might have come from Heals; the china tea service was Spode, and the teapot and milk jug were of Georgian silver. They had been brought from England in the small motor yacht, moored in the creek, in which Lermitte travels all round the Gulf. He is a most remarkable character. When he entertains it is in the 'pukka' English fashion, with doilies, thin bread and butter and iced cakes, but when alone or in the desert, Lermitte is more Arabian than the Arabs themselves. He is probably more liked and respected than any foreigner in the Gulf; he speaks several Arabian dialects fluently, and has penetrated into inaccessible parts of the desert which no other travellers have visited. Yet he seldom speaks of his experiences, and has not written a line about them. I regret having to mention his name, for Lermitte (the name was originally L'Hermite, he tells me) hates publicity above all else, but a book on the Trucial Oman Coast would be incomplete if it did not refer to him.

In appearance he is the typical public school form master—neat, small, scholarly, with patrician features and an æsthetic air; a gentle man, with twinkling blue eyes and little of the 'strong man' about him. He will as soon talk about cricket or bridge as about the Arabs, whom he loves, for he is the perfect host. A Government official once told me that Lermitte knows more about the Omani tribes than any other Englishman, for he has lived with them in their tents and is treated by them as an equal. His influence with the sheikhs is tremendous, and I honestly believe that for his sake they would stop a tribal war if it interfered with his interests.

Lermitte has spent twenty years in Arabia and the Middle [471] East. His job consists in travelling all over south-eastern Arabia in search of oil concessions; when he has obtained these he had to visit each sheikh and headman periodically and pay them the concession fees. These sometimes amount to thousands of rupees, and Lermitte has to carry the money across the desert in cash. This entails the formation of a large caravan, for the money is contained in chests, bound to the backs of camels; a small army of armed guards accompanies the caravan, for Lermitte has been attacked by bandits in the past. On one occasion he was ambushed by Bedouins and taken prisoner, but his charm and knowledge of the language soon obtained his release, without recourse to outside help. That is the sort of man he is.

We were lucky to find him at his home in Dubai, for he is

000 rarely away from the desert; he lives quite alone and does not invite the society of his fellow-countrymen, except when he is in Bahrain, where he is obliged to live the conventional social life. He habitually wears Arab dress, eats Arab food and sleeps in a tent. Although virtually unknown to the general public, this man, who exerts as much influence on the Arabs as Lawrence of Arabia ever did, is a personal friend of Bertram Thomas, and is a respected figure in Bahrain. Lermitte seldom visits Europeans in the Gulf and it was a great occasion, therefore, when he consented to dine with me at the Fort one evening. As he sat in my room after dinner, recounting fascinating tales of his experiences in the desert, I felt as near to hero-worship as I have ever been. Maharajahs, a Cabinet Minister, millionaires, major-generals, air chief marshals, peers and an ambassador have sat in that room, drinking my whisky and smoking my cheroots, yet to my mind they were mere nobodies compared with this grave, enigmatical little man who could travel a thousand miles over the desert, with thousands of pounds in his pockets, without being molested.

674 On the way back to our launch, Bernard, an Indian traffic
609 clerk who had accompanied us on the journey to Dubai, told me that a relative of his was murdered a few weeks ago. An Indian merchant of Dubai, he was lured into the desert sixty miles away, by a letter which asked him to visit an encampment of Bedouin tribesmen who wished to purchase several hundred sacks of flour. When he arrived at the encampment he was taken into a tent and stabbed in the back. He had foolishly brought several thousand rupees with him, and this was stolen. The crime was reported to the Political Officer, but no trace was ever found of the assailants. Bedouin treachery is not unknown and these tribesmen have been responsible for several murders of foreigners.

A few years ago a British official, Colonel Leachman, attended a conference of Arab chiefs. Agreement could not be reached on a certain point and one of the sheikhs began to abuse the British Government; Colonel Leachman momentarily lost his temper, and one of the sheikh's sons crept behind him and drove a dagger into his heart. This incident was described to me by Lermitte, who was a great friend of Leachman's. It is a lesson for all who would have dealings with the Arabs. Lermitte himself is always calm and good-humoured; he will sit with the Arabs in their tents for hours without speaking, and they say of him that he has 'an understanding silence'.

On the way back to Sharjah we passed a squat, white building 743
about two miles from the town. It was built by a wealthy merchant 776
of Dubai and presented to the town as a lazar, or leper hospital. Yet to this day it has never been used, for the local tradition is that it is haunted by a djinn, or evil spirit. Arabs suffering from leprosy, who have been turned out of the town, will prefer to stay in the open desert than enter the accursed house. Belief in djinns is very strong in Oman, though I have never before heard of a new building being haunted. It is probable, as with Chinese houses, 777
that they are considered to be unlucky if they are built on a spot which has an evil reputation and is not protected by *fung-shui*, as the Cantonese call 'fortunate winds'.

That evening, accompanied by two officers from the Fort, I 585
attended an Arab wedding which was held outside the sheikh's 595
palace. The bridegroom was one of our mechanics; he already possessed one wife and three children, but he had recently been given a rise in pay and, being a true follower of the Prophet, wished to increase the dignity of his household. The marriage ceremony was held in the mosque and directly the happy couple emerged they were surrounded by a vast crowd of relatives, friends and sightseers. A small band, consisting of drums and pipes, led the procession, which soon grew to two or three hundred persons. Behind the band was the bridegroom, seated on a camel with two of his sons, his eyes tightly bandaged so that he should not see his bride, who followed blushingly on a donkey.

The procession halted in front of the palace and a rhythmic tune of pipe and drum sent the onlookers into a frenzied dance, in which we were expected to join. A young man in a green turban, whom I recognized as one of our bearers, leapt into the middle of the dancers and began to sing a passionate love-song. There was a good deal of abandon, giggling amongst the women, and flirtation, all the usual Arab restraint being flung to the winds. The music and dancing continued until sunset, when torches and flares were lit and the procession repaired to a village two miles away. We did not attend the nuptial feast, which I heard later ended in an orgy, with several broken heads, as I had another engagement at the Iraqui Levies' camp. I felt very sorry for the bridegroom's first wife; she was a sad and lonely figure on her little brown donkey, and seemed to be the only one who did not enjoy the carousing. This was not surprising,

585 since within a few days she was due to bear her amorous spouse a
595 fourth child.

000 The Iraqui Levies, with whose officers I had dinner that evening, are the most famous regiment in the Middle East, which they have patrolled with quiet efficiency for many years. With their shorts and Anzac-type hats, decorated with a white egret plume, they are extremely smart in appearance and, in action, are fearless and bold fighters. The regiment is commanded by a brigadier whose headquarters are in Basrah, and all the senior officers are British. The remainder, as well as the troops themselves, are composed of Assyrians, Armenians and Yashidis recruited from all parts of the Middle East. The Assyrians, who are Christians, descendants of the race which has endured persecution for hundreds of years, are fine physical specimens and make first-rate soldiers, being loyal and mentally superior to most of the races found in the Iraq region. They are inclined to be stocky, with muscular bodies, and broad, copper-coloured faces; in many ways their features resemble those of the southern Turks.

We sat down in the open air at large trestle tables to a meal of roast lamb, curried rice, vegetables steamed in oil, and a pudding made of honey and pancakes. The Levies, having no Mohammedans in their ranks, have no inhibitions as regards alcohol, and the table looked like the bar of a West End hotel in peace-time. Some of the men got very merry on the fiery Cyprus brandy and began to sing the songs of their country.

The most interesting were the Yashidis, who are a community of 'Devil Worshippers' who come from a mountain stronghold called Tel-afar, on the borders of northern Iraq and the Syrian desert. Their worship of Satan is purely propitiatory, since they believe that if lip-service is paid to the Evil One he will forbear from causing them harm and will give them his protection. Membership of this community is revealed by the sign of a circle and a dot, which is tattooed on the forearm. The Yashidi are forbidden to mention or write the letter 'S', which, being the first letter of Shaitan's name, is considered by them to be sacred and unmentionable. Since my own name begins with this letter my hosts were very careful to prefix it with the characteristic 'O' of my Irish ancestors; to have referred to me simply as 'Shea' would have caused the Yashidis to regard me with suspicion, not to say hostility.

My name (which gives difficulty even to some English people), My name (which gives difficulty even to some English people) was also the cause of some temporary embarrassment amongst 795 the Omani tribes, since when incorrectly pronounced it resembled the name of the Sh'ia or Sh'ea tribe, a sect of Sunnis who are very much disliked by orthodox Mohammedans. The Sh'ias are one of the sects who believe that Ali, the son-in-law of Mahomet, should have succeeded the Prophet as Caliph. A similar experience befell my cousin, General Sir John Shea, when he was with Allenby in Palestine, only on this occasion the Arabs accorded him respect, on account of his name, rather than hostility. They would not believe that he was not a descendant of Alquum-Sh'ea, an Arab prophet of the sixteenth century, greatly revered by the tribes of the North African littoral. In actual fact the name is derived from the Gælic, Seaghdha, meaning 'stately or sagacious'.

Two incidents occurred at this time which dampened the good 000 spirits of the camp. A sergeant attached to the R.A.F. Staging Post was drowned whilst bathing, and an Indian of the Pioneer contingent ran amok and killed a number of people before he committed suicide. The sergeant, who was due to be repatriated to England the day following the tragedy, was sunbathing on the beach, when he heard the cries of a swimmer who was out of his depth. He dashed into the sea and managed to hold the drowning man's head above the water, but before he could reach the shore a large wave caught him and swept him out to sea. Ironically, the man he had set out to rescue was saved, whilst the sergeant lost his life.

The Levies provided a guard of honour at the funeral, which was attended by representatives of all the units of the camp, and the coffin was laid to rest under a little white cross on Cemetery Hill. Thousands of Englishmen were dying on the battlefronts of France and Burma, and the death of one man was, perhaps, an insignificant event, but in a small community of Europeans such as ours at Sharjah, it was an occasion for sombre reflection. Although I loved Arabia, I had no wish to leave my bones in the desert, and the sight of the grave of that young Englishman, snatched away in the prime of life, filled one with sadness.

The other affair was much more dramatic. An Indian soldier-artisan, who had been refused leave to visit his wife in India, suddenly began to get 'queer'. Instead of being placed under protective arrest he was left alone and shunned by his fellow-Indians. One night he rushed screaming out of his tent while the camp was asleep; two sentries who attempted to stop him were shot, one through the heart, and a military policeman was seriously injured. Shots were fired through the commanding officer's tent, without doing any damage, however, and the madman, after running two miles into the desert, then proceeded to blow his brains out.

The incident led to a certain amount of unrest among the Indian troops, many of whom were given leave, whilst a number were replaced by fresh troops. For several nights the camp was patrolled by the Iraqui Levies, but no further incidents occurred to disturb the peace. The tragedy coincided with the visit to Sharjah of Major Cooper, the area commandant of the Levies, an old friend of ours, who invariably stayed at the Fort during his visits. He was a campaigner of the old school, who had spent years soldiering in India before transferring to the Levies, and was looking forward to his retirement in England. I often wonder whether he found a place in Sussex and realized his ambition—to cultivate daffodils for the Covent Garden market!

## CHAPTER XV

THERE were several political changes at Sharjah at this time, the 000 most important being the replacement of Captain Richard ('Dicky') Bird, the charming and lovable Political Officer, by Captain M. O'Connor Tandy, an irrepressible Irishman with the impish humour of a leprechaun. The other was the retirement of the Khan Bahadur Abdur bin Razzak, a man of deep learning and great wisdom, whose influence in Oman had been instrumental in maintaining peace and order on the Trucial Coast; he was replaced by Mr. Jasmin bin Muhammad Kadhawi, a senior civil servant from Bahrain.

I think everybody in the camp was sorry to lose Captain Bird, although we rejoiced to think that his posting to Bahrain as Assistant to the Political Resident (Major Hickenbotham) meant a well-earned promotion. With his unfailing good humour—in the most trying of circumstances—his deep understanding of human nature, both Arab and European, and his tolerance of fools, he possessed other qualities which endeared him to all men. As an ambassador of Great Britain he helped to restore the confidence of the Arabs in his country and its rulers, at a time when, to quote Mr. Churchill, we passed through 'the darkest hours of our history', and our withdrawals in North Africa and elsewhere might have lost us prestige. Bird was always gentle, tactful and courteous, yet he could be firm and resolute when occasion demanded; the sheikhs always treated him with great respect and affection, and when he took his leave from Sultan bin Saqr, that proud prince kissed him on the forehead—a mark of esteem seldom bestowed on a foreigner.

Captain Tandy was a different type—boisterous and adventurous; yet he was quick to form friendships among Arabs and Europeans, although his dealings with the former were often brusque. I liked him very much and he was a welcome guest at the Fort, where, indeed, he spent much of his time, as the Residency was being redecorated and was not fit for habitation for some weeks. Tandy was shrewd and sly-humoured, with a boyish eagerness to get

all the fun that he could out of desert life, yet he worked exceedingly
000 hard and devoted several hours each day to the study of Arabic.

245 Tandy had been instructed to pay a visit to Djaidh to discuss
491 with the tribal leaders the continuation of work on the wells which
irrigate the large date plantations for which this district is famous.
Djaidh, which is not a village but a district, lies about fifty miles
east of Sharjah on the direct camel route, but the sand tracks are
extremely soft for vehicular traffic and Tandy had chosen a
circular route by way of Falat-al-'Ali and Muraq-quibat, where the
road is reasonably good and has a hard surface. It added twenty
miles to the journey, but the extra comfort and ease of travel
compensated for this.

622 I had been invited to join the party, since Captain Tandy had
101 expectations of meeting Sheikh Mahommed bin Ali, ruler of the
wild Beni Quitab tribe of Bedouins. I had often expressed a
609 wish to see this chief, whose fierceness and bold character were
celebrated in Oman; I never expected to have this privilege, for
the Beni Quitab lived in remote and inaccessible parts of the desert,
mostly at the foothills of the Jebel-al-Faiyah range, and were
continually changing their camping-ground. It was reported,
moreover, that they were hostile to foreigners and that Sheikh
Mahommed had met only two Europeans, one of them being
Sir Geoffrey Prior, the British Resident, who had difficulty in
finding him. Arabs are very chary of giving information to
foreigners concerning the whereabouts of Bedouin tribes, presumably because they fear reprisals.

312 Owing to the waterless nature of Oman—which is, geographic-
245 ally, merely a coastal extension of the Great Southern Desert, or
Rub-al-Khali—date plantations of any appreciable size are rare.
[438] On the Oman Gulf side of the peninsula, and at Muscat, they flourish
to such an extent that their export forms one of the staple industries
of this part of south-east Arabia, but west of the Shimailiyah the
[471] only large plantations are at Falaj-al-'Ali and Djaidh, where their
ownership is shared by the tribes in common. Djaidh is neutral
territory, but the responsibility for managing the plantations is
divided between the Sheikhs of Sharjah and Kalba; the Sheikh of
Ras-al-Khaimah is responsible for the plantations at Falaj-al-'Ali,
although the Sheikh of Umm-al-Quwain has some interest in
this plantation. The district is inhabited by Kalba tribesmen, who
live in encampments near the wells; they are responsible, through
their headmen or sub-chiefs, for the maintenance of the irrigation

system, although the actual excavation and sinking of wells is done 312
by negro slave labour. 245

The plantations at Djaidh are the largest and cover several hundred acres; the trees are exceptionally fine and tall, and the yield of dates is above average. The water used for their irrigation is drawn from deep natural wells at the foothills of Jebel Faiyah, a dozen miles away, and passes along subterranean channels by gravity flow. All along this route wells have been dug to meet this channel, in order to keep it clear of obstructions, since the walls frequently cave in and the channel becomes blocked with sand and boulders from the river bed. The depth of the channel varies from twenty to fifty feet; it is built on the Persian principle of irrigation and is said to be several hundred years old. Labourers work inside the channel, which is about twenty feet in circumference, shovelling out the loose sand and debris; this is piled into baskets, which are raised to the surface by means of a primitive pulley, which rests on a crude trestle of tree-boughs. Four labourers are employed at each well, two underground and two at the surface.

The work had not been progressing satisfactorily this year 731
and complaints had been made to the Political Officer that the 464
channel was congested and that an insufficient flow of water was 312
reaching the plantations. This was a matter of some concern to 245
the authorities, since, if the plantations were deprived of water there would be a danger of the trees dying, or at least of the fruit withering on the stems. If this occurred, thousands of Arabs would be unemployed in the autumn (the date-picking season), and the price of dates would rise out of all proportion to local incomes, as they would have to be imported from Muscat or Basrah. A great many of the inland tribes derive their livelihood from the seasonal crops, and they are well paid for picking and packing the dates.

We set off shortly after breakfast, in two four-wheel-drive 000
trucks, the party consisting of Captain Tandy, Mr. T. F. Williamson, geologist to the Basrah Petroleum Company, Mr. Jasim bin Muhammed Kadhawi (Residency Agent at Sharjah), myself, and Sheikh Hamid bin Abdulla, a nephew of the Regent of Kalba, who has a dependency or settlement near Djaidh, the tribesmen
of which maintain the wells. Owing to the grass-covered dunes 487
and shifting sands of the direct camel route, we took the coastal road through Ajman and Hera as far as Umm-al-Quwain, a distance of thirty miles. Skirting Umm-al-Quwain, which is a small

487 seaport famous to mariners for its watch-towers which guard the
hills behind the town, we forked right and drove along the main
caravan route to Falaj-al-'Ali, which is rather rough and tortuous.

487 The first ten miles beyond Umm-al-Quwain were monotonous,
133 a flat expanse of brownish grey desert, unrelieved by the slightest
137 elevation. We were above sea-level, but the high dunes behind
the town obscured all but a shimmer of blue horizon. Later we entered a *batah*, a depression or valley resembling the *Jiri* at Ras-al-Khaimah. This valley, some ten miles long, between terraces of steep sandhills, was luxuriant with acacia trees, both of the *gharf* (flat-topped) and *sumr* (tall) varieties; there were also species of furze and broom, bamboo grass, *abal* and *ashgar* bushes, camel thorn and the thorny *Spici Christi*.

It was astonishingly green, rather like an English glade, so that one half expected to find violets and primroses growing under the clumps of *neam* trees. Water must have been plentiful here, for we saw numerous wells and passed scattered groups of camels grazing on the dry grasses and *abal* bushes. Flowering plants were numerous, including one with tiny white petals, with a furry,
grey-green leaf, which none of us could identify; also a yellow-
136 flowering clover which smelt like mimosa. There were a great
many locusts, both hoppers in the gregarious stage, and large yellow adults (solitary stage), and I captured several specimens in the glass bottle which Captain Joyce, of the Anti-Locust Commission, had given to me. Anyone travelling in the desert is usually requested to report the presence of locusts, since the agents of the Commission are thus able to track the movements, feeding and breeding grounds of these destructive insects.

Other insects we noticed, on stopping at Falaj-al-'Ali for a smoke and a cup of tea, were large black ants with white spots, a leaf-cutter bee (*Megachile*), a large black beetle of the *Rhytinota reichei* species, grasshoppers, butterflies, including a red admiral and a comma; we also saw a 'bacon beetle', common in this part of Oman, which feeds on dry carcases. The ant was unlike any species I had ever seen in the desert. It was a quarter of an inch long, with five white spots on its back (wings); a thin, elongated neck separated the head from the body, and the spidery legs were almost a quarter of an inch from the ground, giving it a curious jerky walk. Jasim said that its bite was poisonous.

Shrikes and larks (*hamra*) darted from behind the sandstone rocks as we approached, and although we looked for their nests we found

none. Our most amusing find was that of a *dhabbi*, a small yellow 136
lizard with a spatulate tail, which it uses as a spade for burrowing
into the sand; it also uses this tail as a paddle and can travel quite
fast by this means. Various species of reptiles are found in this
region, including a large grey lizard, measuring almost four feet
at full growth, the flesh of which is edible. Among snakes there is
the common adder and a species of krait, smaller than the Indian
genus, but highly poisonous. We saw none of these on this
journey, however.

We returned to our cars and were about fifteen miles beyond 000
Umm-al-Quwain and in sight of the plantations of Falaj-al-'Ali
when we came upon the camp of the Anti-Locust Commission.
We hoped to see Joyce, but he was away in the desert towards
Shinas, and we spoke instead to his foreman, an Indian entymologist
from Bombay. He told us that they had completed their work
of collecting and checking specimens in the area, and were now
laying traps and arsenical baits. They boasted that they would
destroy at least ninety-five per cent of the larvæ in this district,
which I found hard to believe. The foreman mentioned that his
party would remain in the desert for twenty-one days and had
just enough rations for that period.

The members of the Commission, who are all Indians except
Captain Joyce, receive about four rupees a day in addition to their
rations and equipment. When they penetrate far into the interior 486
guides and guards are provided by the sheikhs of the locality, at
suitable remuneration. These guides will never enter the territory
of another tribe, so that fresh arrangements have to be made for
each tribal area. The party seldom suffered from molestation, 609
partly because Captain Joyce invariably goes ahead of them and
makes arrangements with the tribes for their safety, but they are
not popular with the Bedouins; this is partly because they do not
trust foreigners, even Indians, and partly because they do not believe
they are hunting for locusts. Even Sheikh Mahommed, who is a
highly intelligent man, told me that he suspected they were secretly
searching for minerals or making maps. From the propertied
sheikhs, on the other hand, the Commission receives every assistance,
as they are anxious to keep the pests away from their crops. The
Bedouins, who do no work and grow nothing but a little millet
or tobacco, are not interested in locust suppression; in fact, locusts [262]
form a part of their diet.

Falaj-al-'Ali lay five miles beyond the camp, but we skirted the 000

Falaj-al-Ali lay five miles beyond the camp, but we skirted the
487 town and trailed over large, gently-undulating plains, varied at intervals by rougher patches formed by the confluence of dunes and ridges. Reaching a steep escarpment with a one-in-three gradient, the truck behind us stuck firmly in the sand. The driver foolishly tried to reverse, the wheels becoming more deeply embedded than ever. We decided to abandon it until our return, leaving a coolie in charge and, by changing gears, just managed to climb the rise with our remaining truck by collecting armfuls of dead boughs and *ashgar* leaves, which we strewed over the yielding sand. It was hot work and we were exhausted by the time we had climbed back into the car.

487
133 The end of the valley began to broaden and gave way to an open plain, the vegetation gradually thinning out until nothing but *abal* bushes were to be seen. A small gazelle, called by the Arabs *dhabi*, or in some parts *ghazal*, darted from behind a bush where it had been grazing, but it was away too quickly for us to attempt a shot; in any case, a bullet from a moving car would have been wasted. The mountains of the Shimailiyah now loomed ahead in the far distance, with the high, isolated peak of Jebel Faiyah thirty miles to the south-east. This peak, which lies beyond Djaidh, is a serrated mass of red and purple sandstone, shaped like a Welsh hat, with the twin, nippled peaks of Qualiddi beside it.

The desert road at this stage disappeared as we entered a wide, dried-up river bed, lined with fine black sand and rubble; this was alluvial deposit washed down from the mountains, and Williamson, our geologist, informed us that it was mostly basalt and igneous rock of the Eocene period, of volcanic origin. Some of the stones were striped with white and contained quartz. Basalt appears to be the geological basis of the higher peaks, intermingled with limestone and sandstone stratæ, quartz, serpentine and gypsum; there are also traces of selenite and alabaster, connected with Miocene beds, and deposits of limonite and ironstone. Further north, in the Ruus-al-Jibal, are older rocks of the Jurassic and Triassic periods, although the foothills around Djaidh are of white limestone and chalk, full of cretacious fossils.

The scenery was extremely wild and barren here, and we passed through a small gorge with high basalt cliffs, where not a shrub or a blade of grass was to be seen. The radiator was getting hot, so we stopped for half an hour to allow it to cool and also to eat our lunch. We could not have chosen a more unfavourable spot. No sooner had we sat with our backs to a large rock than the Shimal

started to blow, and first 'dust devils', then a great cloud of black 487
sand, began to sweep all round us. The sandwiches were ruined, 133
except those in one carton I had not opened, and our eyes smarted for several minutes. The gale quickly died down and we decided to leave at once; it was nearly midday and we wished to reach Djaidh before the hour of prayer.

As we drew close to Djaidh, the plantations of which we could just see through the haze, the ground became extremely rocky, the track leading over a high steppe, which we estimated to be six hundred feet above sea level; this steppe was strewn with large basalt boulders, some as large as a football, which made steering very difficult. The stones were curiously formed and highly
polished, some being striped with white selenite. Williamson, 135
who collected several specimens, told us that there is a certain amount of gold and copper in the mountains here. They are practically unexplored, although a geological survey was made of the Ruus-al-Jibal range recently, the results being published in the Quarterly Journal of the Royal Geological Society. In the passes of these hills are the strongholds of the wild and truculent Shi'hou tribe, some of whom I encountered on my last trip to Ras-al-Khaimah.

The steppe gradually sloped towards a rocky *batah*, a narrow and almost treeless valley, which was in reality a dried-up river bed; the force of the water which flung the boulders down the hillsides must have been tremendous, probably the result of a burst watershed. Williamson believes it may have occurred several thousand years ago, although in the rain season torrents of water annually wash down from the hills and a wide river flows through a mountain pass from Muraq-quibat to Kalba, where it reaches the sea. After five miles the bed narrowed into a small *wadhi*, which in turn gave way to luxuriant, park-like country, thickly wooded with tall acacias, amongst which we spotted herds of wild black donkeys.

A mile ahead was the date plantation. It was the hour of prayer, 245
so we stopped the car and wandered through the dark, jungle-like paths while Jasim, Sheikh Hamid and the drivers said their devotions. The plantation is cross-sectioned by two wide main paths, with high enclosures of palm-leaf fencing on either side; let into this fence at intervals are little wicket gates, which lead to grass paths of a man's width running between the trees. A 'cover' crop of clover, grass and shrub is cultivated at the roots of the trees, as this

245 gives nitrogenous value to the soil. The subterranean channel rises to the surface in the middle of the plantation, where it is collected in a large cement reservoir; from this source the water, carefully controlled in volume, is conveyed by pipes and runnels into narrow ducts constructed at right-angles to the paths. Palm trees are very thirsty and require plenty of water in the hot weather.

A single *Askhari* guarded the plantation, which was noisy with the chatter of brilliantly-plumed birds; for our amusement he climbed a tall palm with the agility of a monkey, using a rope-sling as a support, and dexterously cut a bunch of male flowers for our inspection. The flowers, which have a sickly sweet smell, are tightly packed in a tough protective sheath; these sheaths are sold, when ripe, and used to pollinate the female palms. They are also edible, being very palatable when boiled and eaten with butter sauce. When, a few months later, I passed through Djaidh, the green dates were already forming, and labourers were high in the trees, tying veils of muslin around them to protect them from insects. The dates which are intended for export are gathered when they are light brown, that is, half-ripe, and are often packed
[262 with the stalk attached. The Arabs usually prefer them fully
25] ripe, when the colour is dark brown; over-ripe dates are used for the manufacture of syrup which, when crystallized, makes a good brown sugar. Hives are often kept in the vicinity of the plantations and the air was full of their buzzing as we passed through the glades.

712 Before we reached the encampment we passed the ruins of an old fort. Nothing but the outer shell remained and the gateway had long since lost its magnificent doors; the walls were of rose-pink clay and mortar, and the crumbling tower was crenellated like the ramparts of a mediæval French castle. Sheikh Hamid told us that the fort originally belonged to his grandfather, Sheikh of Kalba, who at one time included Djaidh among his possessions; but a succession of tribal wars had decreased the influence of the Kalba clan and Djaidh had degenerated into neutral ground.

487 The road to the encampment was a mere body-wide track through tall grass, so high in places that we could not see ahead. Presently two little Arab boys, leading an emaciated bull, greeted us as the truck emerged from this forest and entered a wide, muddy
312 river bed. Here we saw the first of the wells. A gang of labourers
483 was busily letting down baskets into the main channel, while the
000 tribesmen looked on. The headman, a fine-looking old Arab

The headman*, a fine-looking old Arab with a white beard and keen eyes, came forward to greet us and 576 introduced us to the local gentry.

They shook us by the hand, the kiss of honour being reserved for Sheikh Hamid alone. Salim bin Raschid, the headman, amazed us by declaring that he had anticipated our visit. When we enquired how this was, he merely shook his head and smiled. The only explanation I can give is that some servant of the Residency Agent's at Sharjah had passed the information to a friend, and that the news had been conveyed to Djaidh by a passing caravan. The argument against this is that the decision to make the journey was only made by Captain Tandy the day previously, although he had discussed it with Jasim.

The headman allowed me to take a photograph of him and insisted on shaking my hand again when I had done so. The Arabs do not shake hands vigorously, as we do, but in a gentle, feminine way, letting the tips of their fingers linger in your palm. Accom- 312 panied by the notables, we inspected the wells, where stalwart young negroes at once assumed an air of great preoccupation and began hauling at the winches and emptying the full baskets which came up. We peered down the well and could just see the heads of the labourers working in the channel. The headman said they had just cleared the well base after a heavy fall of sand, and had increased the height of the roof to eight feet. He assured Tandy that the work was making good progress and that he would be personally responsible to the Sheikh of Sharjah for its continuance.

We spent half an hour at the wells, where Tandy and William- 487 son engaged in technical discussions with the Arab engineers, and 133 then took the road leading to the Beni Quitab encampment. No one seemed to know quite where it was, except that it lay towards the lower slopes of Jebel Faiyah, and was about twelve miles distant. Salim lent us a couple of guides, who clung precariously to the running board as we plunged across the river bed and sped up the steep, grass-covered banks. Here we entered a country which looked very much like the veldt of South Africa; in fact, just the sort of terrain in which one expects to find lions.

This country, called by the Arabs *Mar[illegible]kh abu Laila*, extends 487 at the foot of the mountains from Muraq-qibat to Baraimi, a 133 distance of nearly a hundred miles, and is about ten miles in width. 136 It is completely wild, the haunt of gazelle, hares, mountain wolves and occasionally the rare, long-horned oryx. It was here, many years ago, that Williamson shot a leopard, an animal which previous

*[at Djaidh -- Analyst]

travellers had declared did not exist in Oman. There was no road
133 and the ground was hard and very bumpy, full of holes and nullahs.
136 Tall grasses and shrubs grew in profusion, including *shinan* and the
[137] sea-green *harm* as well as some *Hadh* bushes, indicative of recent
rain or heavy dews. The yellow flowers of the *zahr* blossomed in
487 abundance, attracting myriads of insects, whilst several hares
darted ahead of our truck and scurried away into their holes. The
acacia (*samr*) trees grew in thin copses and were frequently fifteen
feet high, which is unusual in this part of the desert.

000 When we had traversed five miles of this wooded country without so much as a trace of human life, our guides became nervous and begged to be allowed to return to Djaidh. We let them go, giving them a handful of biscuits and some tobacco as a gift, but before they left us they pointed to a site some two miles ahead where, they said, the *Badu* had last encamped. When we came upon this site we did, indeed, find the remains of a camp, the grass being lighter in patches than the surrounding herbage, whilst nearby was an old well and the dead embers of a fire. But of the *Badu* there was no sign.

We sat on a hillock for a few minutes, drinking tea, while
Tandy and Williamson made a survey of the land; there were
no tracks to guide us and nothing to indicate where the *Badu*
101 might have concealed themselves. Sheikh Hamid, an amusing
raconteur, recounted tales of the Beni Quitab tribe. These nomads
number several thousand and, split into various sections, they roam
all over the Oman country; branches of this tribe are to be found
in the Nejd and Kuwait, but these have separate sheikhs and do not
[181] owe allegiance to Mohammed bin Ali. They are a wild, simple
people, despising both the town dwellers and those who work
with their hands. They live on dates, which they mostly steal,
262 camels' milk, fish and rice. Some of these commodities they are
438 obliged to buy, and the money for this purpose they obtain by selling
camels, animal skins, including wolves, lizard and ibex; donkeys,
wild honey, cheese and gazelle meat.

233 The Beni Quitab are famous camel breeders and during our trip
across the *Marbakh* we saw large herds of these animals with their
calves. They also breed donkeys, capturing the wild asses when
241 young, and gather wild honey from the plains. Although they
do as little work as possible, they cultivate small patches of ground
276 to which they return twice a year, growing millet and tobacco,
which they smoke in tiny pipes with cane stems.

which they smoke in tiny pipes with cane stems. The sheikh 006
also collects 'protection' money from the neighbouring sheikhs, 619
in return for which the Beni Quitab guarantee not to molest the tribesmen. Should this money not be forthcoming, however, a raid on the nearest town or village is a foregone conclusion; then slaves and camels will be stolen, to be sold later in the Baraimi market.

Tandy reported that he had detected a trail of smoke in the 609
distance, so we decided to keep on our course. Eventually we reached a fenced-in enclosure, at one end of which was a low clay wall; leaning against the wall was an aged, toothless Arab. For a few leaves of tobacco he agreed to lead us to the *Badu* encampment. To our surprise it lay but a hundred yards to our right, screened from view by a hedge of scrubs. As we approached the goats'-skin tents of the tribesmen, a group of armed men calmly awaited us.

'Praise be to Allah! And who may you be?' enquired the elder of the guards.

'Praise be to Allah, and peace be on your heads!' replied Tandy, in his best Arabic, holding out his hand as a token of friendship. 'We come from the British Government, and are friends of Sheikh Mohammed bin Ali—may the blessings of Allah give peace to his old age! We desire you to take us to him.'

The guards nodded gravely at this speech and, hedging us in on either side, conducted us towards the main tent. There was a curious air of silence about the encampment; none of the occupants came out to stare at us and the only signs of activity were some chickens and goats in a pen, and the tethered camels which snarled as we passed. As we waited outside the flap of the tent opened and Hadi, the sheikh's son, emerged. He greeted Sheikh Hamid as an old friend and was introduced by him to Jasim, Tandy and the remainder of the party. Hadi expressed surprise at the visit, which he said was unexpected; his father and the older members of the tribe were asleep, and the others were out hunting.

The tent, which he invited us to enter, was a small, ramshackle [342]
affair of goats'-hair and sacking tied over *gharf* branches; a cheap Dubai mat lay on the floor. No sooner were we seated than the local notables came in to meet us and we had to rise on each occasion, nearly knocking the tent over as we did so. At length they were all assembled, seated around the floor in a circle. With twenty men in such a small space the atmosphere soon became suffocatingly hot, and the situation was not improved by the hundreds of flies

609 which buzzed around us. These *Badu*, whose ages ranged from
[511] twenty to eighty years of age, were all bearded and very dirty;
although they were the notables of the camp, their clothing was
ragged and scanty, and my preconceptions of the romantic nomad's
life they led quickly vanished. They were, if the truth be told,
mere gipsies of the desert, as wild and treacherous as the nomad
can be.

Sheikh Hadi, who had left us to be stared at by these strange
creatures, who plucked at their beards and whispered to one
[291] another (Tandy's bare legs were a subject of much scandalized
comment), presently reappeared with his father. Sheikh Moham-
622 med bin Ali, ruler of all the Beni Quitab tribes of Oman, was a
609 magnificent figure, in spite of his eighty years. Over six feet
tall, thin and sinewy, he had a flowing white beard and a pair of
the keenest eyes I have ever seen. His face, dominated by a sharp,
hawk-like nose, was the colour of old parchment and revealed great
character and power. All stood up as he entered the tent, stooping
low at the entrance, and there was a long silence as we were in-
troduced by Sheikh Hamid.

When the Sheikh Mohammed had taken his place in the circle we returned to our squatting position, while Tandy alone conversed with the sheikh about the weather, the state of the crops and the health of the camels. The rest of us did not speak, eyeing the gnarled face of Mohammed, with its great, hooked nose and deep-set eyes, with something approaching awe. Then something which Tandy said made the old man laugh and the spell was broken. Cigarettes were produced and a babel of conversation broke loose. Tandy got down to business and discussed local politics, the irrigation project at Djaidh, and finally, realizing that the old man was in a good humour, asked him if he would provide guides for the Anti-Locust Commission, which wanted to enter the mountain pass beyond Jebel Faiyah.

'Praise Allah, but they are spies, these Indians!' the sheikh laughed. 'They want to map out my land and then build huts on it, like they did at Sharjah. Next, your Government will want to flatten the ground to make a nest for the great sky-birds, *ti-ara* (aeroplanes). Truly, the ways of Allah are mysterious and wonderful, but the ways of the foreigner are cunning.' The others considered this speech a huge joke, and laughed and applauded. Then Tandy, who is no mean diplomat, suggested that the Beni Quitab were afraid that the Anti-Locust party, by

poisoning the larvæ, would destroy the tribe's food supply. This 622
produced more laughter, since the locust is only regarded as an 609
occasional tit-bit and is not a regular part of their diet. The
sheikh pulled his beard, roared with laughter at this sally, revealing
his long, yellow fangs, and finally agreed to provide as many guides
as the party required.

A shout from one of the guards caused Hadi to leap to his feet 721
and run towards the entrance. He returned in a moment to inform
us that a caravan of raiders, presumably *Badus*, had passed the
encampment about a mile away. We hurriedly left the tent and
were just in time to see the raiding party, which consisted of about
fifty camels, disappearing in the dust at great speed. Hadi said
they were moving in the direction of Dubai and probably had as
their objective one of the numerous villages near the coast. Sheikh
Mohammed denied that they were men of his tribe, but Tandy
afterwards told me that there was some doubt as to the truth of this
statement.

When we returned to the tent, a slave brought in bowls of 574
warm camels' milk which were passed round the circle. It was 609
very refreshing and had a sweet taste, though I did not relish drinking
from the bowl after it had passed the lips of my exceedingly
dirty hosts. In few, if any books on desert travel is the dirtiness of 000
the Arabs referred to; this is either because the authors have become
enured to their primitive surroundings and take them for granted,
or else because they consider it bad form to allow such commonplace
details to intrude into their art. Both St. John Philby and
Mr. Bertram Thomas are liberal in their allusions to camel dung,
but their awareness of the filth and odours of Arab towns is never
made apparent to the reader. Unfortunately I was born with a
fastidious mind and a nose as sensitive as an insect's antennæ, and
no amount of admiration for the Arabs can make me oblivious
of their habits, although some Arabs are far cleaner than many
Europeans.

When the bowls of milk had been passed round we were pressed 574
to partake of dates, covered thickly with flies, little squares of 609
Turkish delight, chipatties with a coating of *ghi*, and good Arab
coffee. After a smoke and some light conversation, we had more
coffee, until Tandy, reminding the sheikh that we must take our
departure, asked permission to leave. There was a very strong
smell of camel in the tent; the creatures were tethered to ropes
outside, and were growling and swearing because they were being

574 milked. The remnants of our meal were soon gobbled up by a
689 crowd of retainers and servants who had been hanging around the
tent door, impatiently awaiting our departure. Sheikh Mohammed
was exceedingly pleased to receive a gift of two 2-cwt. bags of
white flour which Tandy had brought in the car, a present from the
British Government.

[772] I had wished to take a photograph of the sheikh and managed
to do so when he was not looking; the old man greatly objected
to cameras, as he believed that an enemy, by looking at the print,
could cause him evil by witchcraft. He is extremely superstitious
and, had he seen my camera, would have demanded its destruction.
As it was we parted on the best of terms, the sheikh and his retainers
600 walking with us as far as the car. The sun was beginning to drop
behind the sand-dunes as we left, casting a rosy glow over the foot-
hills of Jebel-al-Faiyah, so we sped along the rough track at top
speed, stopping at the wells to say good-bye to the headman, and
at the derelict fort near Djaidh to take a photograph—which did
not come out, as I had foolishly forgotten to turn the film. Twelve
miles from Djaidh our truck broke down (we found out later that
water had got into the carburettor), and we prepared for a night
in the desert, collecting dead tree stumps and dry branches of acacia
to light a fire.

The sun fell sharply behind the sandhills, making long shadows on the dunes, and the mountains turned purple and then black. Venus and Sirius gleamed like diamonds, and the sickle of a new moon shone with the radiance of polished silver; the stars in the desert sky were unusually bright and we gazed at Aldebaran, the Pleiades, Orion's Belt, Castor and Pollux, the Heavenly Twins. The fire burned up fiercely, for there was a chilly sea breeze, and we huddled together round it, eating an Arab sweetmeat which Jasim produced.

We were about to make a rough tent out of our coats and a sheet from the truck and settle down for the night, when our driver called out that he saw a light ahead. It was a speck of white in the distance, but it soon grew larger and we saw that it was the glare of a car's headlamps. We switched on our own lights and made a signal. When it drove up, it turned out to be one of the Anti-Locust Commission's trucks. They had awaited our return and, when darkness fell, had correctly assumed that we had had a breakdown and had come out to help us. We were unable to repair our own vehicle, having no suitable tools, so, crowding into the Commission's truck, we left it in the desert under guard. 000

After an hour's journey we reached the Commission's encampment and had a hot meal of curried hash, potatoes, sweet tea and fruit, and settled down for the night. Yarning over the fire before we turned in, Captain Tandy told me that his father, an Army officer in the service of the Indian Government, had been murdered in the Nejd in 1913, whilst attempting to settle a frontier dispute with a Turkish delegate; a scuffle had ensued, during which Major Tandy had received a fatal knife wound.

The Arabs are great tale-tellers and Sheikh Hamid, listening 622 to this account, could not hold back his version of the Kalba 175 succession. It was the story of his uncle, Sheikh Khali bin Ahmed, now a feeble old man of eighty, who seldom left his territory on the western side of the Shimailiyah mountains. Twenty years ago, when Sultan bin Saqr (father of the present ruler of Sharjah), died, Khali, who was a near relative, succeeded him. The young son of Sheikh Sultan grew up under Khali's protection on the death of his father, but in 1924, the young and ambitious prince, who was twenty-six, decided that the time had come for him to rule Sharjah without Khali's help. To assist him in his plans he enlisted the aid of the Sheikh of Dubai and drove Khali out, compensating him in characteristic Arab fashion by granting him a parcel of land at Djaidh, which he illegally claimed as a dependency.

Shortly afterwards the Sheikh of Kalba died, and there was a dispute between Sultan bin Saqr, who belonged to the same clan as Kalba, the Quasimi, and the Sheikh of Ras-al-Khaimah, over the ascendancy. The Sheikh of Ras-al-Khaimah belonged to a different tribe and had no prescriptive right to the sheikhdom, but he regarded Kalba as strategically part of his territory. The dispute was temporarily settled by the action of the British Government, which appointed Khali as Regent of Kalba until the sheikh's young son, Hamid bin Sayid, came of age. This seemed to be an ideal arrangement, since Khali was unmarried and had no descendants for whom he might entertain ambitions.

Unfortunately Khali was no sooner confirmed as Regent than he began to cast covetous eyes on the sheikhdom. Although he was sixty-four he soon found a bride and by her had four sons. Within two years the young Sheikh Hamid will be of age and, presumably, will ascend the throne; this will not be at all to Khali's liking, for his own sons are growing up and he would prefer to

622 see them rule Kalba. The situation is a delicate one, and although
175 young Hamid is under the protection of both the British Government and Sheikh Sultan bin Saqr, he is living under a shadow. The Government wished to send him away to school, but he recently ran away from an establishment at Bahrain and lives in the Sheikh's palace at Sharjah, in constant fear of being murdered. Should that fate befall him, it is likely that a war between Sharjah and Kalba would be precipitated, with Ras-al-Khaimah and Dubai participating.

This account of Kalba's succession I have related elsewhere, but I give it again because it differs in some respects from the official version. It is a situation which, unless handled with care, might easily be the cause of a long internecine war between the tribes.

# CHAPTER XVI

IN February, 1945, the British Resident of the Gulf, Sir Geoffrey 648
Prior, called a conference of the Trucial sheikhs at Baraimi. Baraimi 631
was chosen as the site for the 'durbar' because it is in neutral territory
and is practically the only part of Oman over which none of the
sheikhs has suzerainty. It lies at the base of the Trucial political
division, and is the meeting place of all the main caravan routes [487]
from Abu Dhabi, Dubai, Sohar (on the Gulf of Oman side of the
peninsula) and Ras-al-Khaimah. Roughly ninety miles south-east of Sharjah, Baraimi, which lies in the middle of a large oasis, is geographically the north-eastern extremity of the great Rub-al-Khali desert. It was from here that I began my journey into that desert later in the year.

For centuries Baraimi has been a centre of the slave trade; 567
lying as it does between the western and eastern coasts of the peninsula, the terminus of the main Oman caravan routes, it is ideally situated for this purpose. In the heyday of the slave traffic, slaves were brought here by ship either from Abu Dhabi or Sohar. The former port was used more extensively towards the end of the nineteenth century, since the suppression of piracy by British gunboats forced the Arab dealers to lie low in the Persian Gulf until they could unload their cargoes.

To-day, there is no direct importation of negro slaves from the African coasts, but a secret traffic exists in the sale of young ex-slaves, negroes and Persians, who are abducted by raiding Bedouins from the villages and towns. These unfortunates are taken to Baraimi, over which territory the British Government has no treaty rights, and are sold in the open market. There is no fixed day for these sales, the dates often being changed or delayed for days and weeks, in order to delude any officials or Government agents who may be in the vicinity. The Political Officers and Indian Government officials with whom I discussed the matter categorically denied that there was a traffic in slaves, but I had evidence to the contrary and determined to find out for myself what truth there was in the stories I had heard.

567 The Khan Bahadur Abdur bin Razzak, who employed business and political agents throughout Oman, had assured me quite emphatically that his men had attended sales of slaves at Baraimi; unfortunately they had been unable to procure either the names of the dealers or the buyers, and in the eyes of the British law this did not constitute evidence. On the other hand, there was the case of the Persian merchant (related elsewhere in this book) who was abducted by Bedouins at Dubai and taken into captivity, where he remained as a slave until his escape in March, 1945. The facts of his incarceration were placed before the Political Officer, Captain Bird, and no doubt a full report of the case will be found in the archives of the Government of India.

I have interviewed a number of ex-slaves in Dubai and Sharjah, who confessed that they had been bought by their present masters from the slave market. As a rule, however, the buyers come from other parts of Arabia, generally from Qatar and the Bahrain side of the coast, as the dealers are anxious to get their human wares out of Oman as quickly as possible. Whilst awaiting their disposal and transportation from the Trucial Coast, these wretched creatures are kept in filthy dungeons in Baraimi, or else in the open desert where there is no likelihood of their being traced.

High prices are still paid for slaves and there is little doubt that the sheikhs connive at the trade, although they are only too ready to protest to the authorities if any of their subjects are abducted. The chief agents of the slave traffic are the Bedouin tribesmen, who are feared by the sheikhs, so that even if the latter wished to stop the trade they could only do so by uniting and waging a protracted war against the *Badu*.

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567 The difficulty facing the British (or Indian) Government in this matter is that Treaty rights extend to the coast of Trucial Oman only, and not to the interior, and Baraimi is neutral ground for which no one will claim responsibility. The site—it is scarcely a town—is largely inhabited by nomadic tribes of Bedouins, and is a noted refuge for the harbouring of criminals and desperate characters. Nothing less than an expedition and the establishment of a permanent police post would serve to abolish the slave market, and this could be done only if the British Government declared the Trucial Coast a Protectorate. It is extremely unlikely that such a step will be taken. Throughout the Middle East the Arab world is in a state of political ferment and, given the slightest provocation, the tribes might at any time unite and declare a 'Holy War' against

British and foreign influence in Palestine, Trans-Jordan, Iraq and 567
Arabia. 648

To seize a part of Arabia and declare it to be under the political protection of the British Empire would, according to my information, give the Arab League and its satellite organizations justifiable reasons for demanding full and unequivocable Arab independence in every country in the Middle East. As most political students of the Arab question are aware, the Jewish situation is a mere pawn in the political game, a bargaining point which the malcontents are using to obtain world sympathy and to give them a valid excuse for furthering their political aims. It is reasonable to suppose, therefore, that the Socialist Government will pursue the *laissez-faire* policy of its predecessors and leave the Trucial Oman Coast in its present state of impoverishment and degradation. And the slave trade will continue.

On behalf of British rule in the past, it must be said in all fair- 567
ness that in the last century the Government played a principal part in the repression of the traffic, and nowhere more so than on the East African coast and in south-west Asia. In the old days it was vastly different. For example, on board the fleet which in 1626 conveyed Sir Dodmore Cotton, a British Ambassador with his staff from Surat to Bundar Abbas, there were more than three hundred slaves bought by Persians in India, and the only remark which this circumstance suggested to Sir Thomas Herbert, the chronicler of the embassy, was that 'ships, besides the transporting of riches and rarities from place to place, consociate the most remote regions of the earth by participation of commodities and of other excellencies to each other'.

In 1772, however, it was decided by the English courts that a slave, as soon as he set his foot on the soil of the British islands, became free; but the slave trade and the owning of slaves continued abroad under the British flag until a much later date. In 1790, out of some 74,000 slaves exported annually from Africa, not less than 38,000 belonged to British merchants. In 1811 an Act was passed declaring the traffic in slaves to be felony and was made punishable by transportation. In 1833 proprietory rights in slaves was abolished throughout the British dominions, but the final liberation of all slaves did not take place until August, 1838, the transition having been effected, in most places, by means of a period of indentured apprenticeship.

Slavery in the Persian Gulf has been regarded as a prerogative of Arab merchants returning from Zanzibar for centuries, and they did not take kindly to British anti-slave laws. In 1822 a treaty was concluded with the Sultan of Muscat, Saiyid Sa'id, which prohibited the sale of slaves to Christian nations by the Saiyid's subjects, and empowered the British Government to establish a British agent in the Saiyid's dominions in East Africa to watch the trade and seize any Omani vessels found carrying slaves to Christian countries.

Great opposition was met from the sheikhs of Trucial Oman, for the prohibition is said to have cost the Sultan of Muscat alone 100,000 dollars a year. To the Mohammedan population, by whose religion slavery was lawful and who had come by long custom to depend on a regular supply of slaves, it was anathema.

British reconnaissance of the Gulf and Aden Sea continued throughout the century, but with little success. In 1856 the corvette *Falkland* cruised against slavers in the outer Gulf between Jask and Sohar, with moderate success, but slaves continued to reach the Persian coast higher up in larger numbers. In 1860 it was estimated by Brigadier-General Coghlan that about 4,000 slaves were carried away every year from Africa to Arabia and the Persian Gulf, but the Political Officer at Zanzibar put the figure as high as 10,000.

*The Times of India* of October, 1872, contained the following description of a slave vessel taken by the *Vulture*:

'The number of slaves it was impossible at the time to estimate; so crowded on deck, and in the hold below was the dhow, that it seemed but for the aspect of misery, a very nest of ants. The hold, from which an intolerable stench proceeded, was several inches deep in the foulest bilge-water and refuse. Down below there were numbers of children and wretched beings in the most loathsome stages of smallpox and scrofula of every discription. A more disgusting and degrading spectacle of humanity could hardly be seen, whilst the foulness of the dhow was such that the sailors could hardly endure it. When the slaves were transferred to the *Vulture* the poor wretched creatures were so emaciated and weak that many had to be carried on board, and lifted for every movement. How it was that so many survived such hardships was a source of wonder to all that belonged to the *Vulture*.

'On examination by the surgeon it was found that there were no less than thirty-five cases of smallpox in various stages; and from the time of the first taking of the dhow to their landing at Butcher's Island, Bombay, fifteen died out of the whole number of 169, and since then there have been more deaths amongst them. But perhaps the most atrocious piece of cruelty of the Arabs was heard afterwards from the slaves themselves; viz., that at the first discovery of smallpox amongst them by the Arabs, all the infected slaves were at once thrown overboard, and this was continued day by day until, they said, forty had perished in this manner. When they found the disease could not be checked, they simply left them to take their chance, and to die. Many of the children were of the tenderest years, scarcely more than three years old, and most of them bearing marks of the brutality of the Arabs in half-healed scars and bruises inflicted from the lash and stick.' 567

Mildness was not a characteristic of the conditions under which the Gulf was at this time supplied with slaves; on the contrary, the methods of the exporters from Africa appear to have been characterized by a barbarity equal to that of their compeers in any part of the world, including the Germans of the present century.

The exporters of slaves to the Persian Gulf were mostly Arabs, who were accustomed to proceed to Zanzibar for the purpose of legitimate trade during the north-eastern monsoon, that is, between November and February, and who generally returned, bringing slaves, either just before or just after the south-west monsoon, that is, in the months of April, May and June. The distance from Zanzibar to Sur is about 2,500 miles, and the voyage normally took from sixteen to twenty-five days.

The slave trade continued until 1907, the demand being high; good children fetched 120 dollars, male adults 150 dollars, and girls 200 to 300 dollars each. In 1901, 1,000 slaves were landed at Sur, but as a result of the firm policy of the British Government, who inflicted heavy fines and imprisonment on slave-traders and even sheikhs, the trade from Africa gradually abated, thanks to the work of Sir Percy Cox, the British Resident at Bushire.

It must not be assumed, however, that slavery has been entirely abolished in Arabia, even in that part which is administered by the Government of India, and it is known to flourish in the dominions of King Ibn Saud and the Yemen. Negro slaves (in many cases the descendants of persons exported from Africa earlier in the century), may still be seen in the houses of the sheikhs and merchants of the Trucial Oman Coast, whilst a great many are employed in the fishing and pearl diving industries.

On one occasion I was talking to a young slave in the establishment of a rich pearl merchant of Dubai. I said to him, when we were alone: 'I suppose your father was an ex-slave who was in service here?' To my surprise he confessed that he had been with his present master only for four years, had been purchased in the Baraimi slave market for 500 rupees, and was born in Zanzibar, whither he had been abducted by Arab merchants when four years old and smuggled into the Hadramaut.

There are numerous records of slave traffic in the early days of this century. In August, 1901, a slave girl was imported by sea from Ras-al-Khaimah to Sharjah, where she was manumitted and a fine of seventy dollars was recovered. In 1904 two cases came to light of the sale at Umm-al-Quwain of boys kidnapped by Baluchis from the opposite coast; in each case the buyer was fined a hundred dollars and was sentenced to a term of imprisonment. On 5th September, 1901, two slaves obtained their freedom on board H.M.S. *Sphinx* at Dalmah Island. They stated that they had been kidnapped from Africa three years before and brought to Sur, whence two years later they had been re-exported to Sharjah. The last case illustrated the well-known fact that the condition of slaves in the Persian Gulf is not a hard one in these times, except in so far as they are employed by their masters for pearl-diving, and that on the Arabian coast it is generally the fear of being sent to sea that drives slaves to abscond.

Slaves are on the whole fairly well treated, often receiving pay as well as their food and quarters, and many slaves prefer serfdom to a life of competition in which they must work hard in order to obtain the bare necessities of life. I make no apology for slavery, which should be abolished in all countries under the British flag, but the fact remains that some slaves even refuse their freedom when it is offered to them and are extremely attached to their masters. The sons of Sultan bin Saqr, Sheikh of Sharjah, all have little slave attendants of their own age, and they are very fond of them. They are not beaten and are allowed to play with their young masters and share most of their privileges.

It has been estimated by Government of India authorities that at least 3,000 slaves have obtained their freedom with British assistance in the last fifty-five years, either on their way to or in the Persian Gulf; and to these must be added the vast but uncertain

number whose exportation from their native countries has been 567
altogether prevented by British naval and other measures.

I have been informed that a regular slave market also exists at the small town of Harfit, as well as at Baraimi, the former being a region owned jointly by the Sultan of Muscat and the Sheikh of Abu Dhabi, although it is too far from the Sultan's seat to make the enforcement of police measures feasible. Several official delegations have been despatched to Baraimi and Harfit in the past to investigate the slave trade, but the Bedouins, who are the principal slave dealers, have a highly-developed intelligence service and long before the approach of any foreigner or political agent the slaves are concealed and the market closed. This deception makes it extremely difficult to obtain any direct evidence. When taxed with the matter, the sheikhs will deny most emphatically that the importation or sale of slaves takes place in their territories.

One sheikh, who was charged a few years ago with aiding and abetting the dealers, went so far as to admit that slaves were imported by Bedouins from Oman proper into the Trucial Oman Coast by caravan. It has also been reported that numbers of slaves are exported to Qatar by sea, but this has not been verified.

On the occasion of Sir Geoffrey Prior's visit to Baraimi, men- 000
tioned at the beginning of this chapter, I informed him that I suspected that a slave market existed there and asked if I could accompany him on his journey. Unfortunately, he declined, and I was very disappointed at the time, for not only had I wished to investigate for myself the tales of slave-dealing in this district, but I also desired to be present at the 'durbar', since it is very seldom that all the principal sheikhs and headmen of the Trucial Oman Coast can be met together. At first it was decided that the sheikhs should meet at the Fort and, after some refreshment, repair to Baraimi by car, but Mohammed bin Ali and several other sheikhs were averse from coming to the camp, and the meeting place had to be changed to Baraimi itself.

Not long after the departure of Sir Geoffrey for Bushire, I persuaded the Khan Bahadur Abdur bin Razzak to lend me a reliable guide and, accompanied by an American friend and two
Askhari guards, I set out for Baraimi in a jeep. The journey 487
occupied about five hours each way, the route taken being via 133
Dubai and the wild, trackless country west of Yidaiyah, which consists for the most part of dunes and high ridges, undulating

481 rose-pink downs and grass-covered depressions covered with the
133 charming *zahr* plant. The going was difficult and no vehicle other
than a jeep could have made it; in addition to the soft sand, there
were sudden outcrops of exposed rock at the base of the sand-ridges, termed by the Arabs *shuqqa*, and on several occasions we
were nearly hurled out of our seats by these obstructions.

361 After five hours of hard driving we reached the fringe of the
609 large oasis of Baraimi, and left our car by a clump of palm trees
while our guide went forward to spy out the lie of the land. He
returned after an interval of fifteen minutes to report that he had
[567] identified several notorious slave dealers of the Beni Quitab tribe,
but could find no signs of a market or slaves. He advised us that
the inhabitants were liable to be hostile, in spite of Sir Geoffrey's
recent visit, and suggested that we should return as speedily as
possible.

Schultz and I had no mind to go back without seeing something of the celebrated 'town', which is in reality a collection of mud huts and tents built around the wells, although there is a small fortified building and we saw one or two shops in the open bazaar; we therefore decided to ignore Abdul's fears. No sooner had we entered the oasis than we were surrounded by a curious crowd, all *Badus*, who insisted on following us to the bazaar.

[443] The bazaar was a temporary structure opened by migrant
dealers for the sale of cheap cloths and foodstuffs, and there was
little of interest for us to see. We looked around for the 'dungeon'
in which slaves were reputed to be detained pending their sale,
but beyond the small fort and one or two other coral buildings,
could see nothing which resembled a prison. Among the crowd,
however, we did notice several negroes whose legs bore the marks
of iron chains and the healed scars of a lash, but they were quickly
hurried out of sight at our approach and we were not allowed to
609 question them. When we attempted to enter the door of the fort
the crowd's attitude became threatening and for a moment I
thought they would attack us.

At length the head Bedouin came forward and asked us what we wanted in Baraimi. We replied that we were friends of Sheikh Mohammed bin Ali and had come to take photographs of the oasis. This appeared to satisfy him, but it was significant that we were not invited into any of the tents or asked to partake of coffee. Plainly, our presence was not desired, and when the headman coldly enquired whether it would not be advisable if we returned to Dubai before sunset, we began to think that there was reason in his words. He accompanied us to the jeep, which we had some difficulty in starting, and we left less than an hour after our arrival. The scowling, muttering crowd watched us go until we had disappeared behind the dunes, and I must confess that until that moment I had a very uncomfortable feeling down my spine.

I had no further opportunity of visiting Baraimi except to pass OOO through it on my journey to the Rub-al-Khali and, in fact, the Political Officer was somewhat annoyed when he learnt of our journey, since he is responsible for the safety of Europeans and other foreigners in the Trucial Coast. We were warned never again to venture into the interior without an official escort, but as Schultz and I were determined to penetrate the Rub-al-Khali before we left Arabia his warning, I am sorry to say, went unheeded.

However, it was no business of mine to investigate the slave traffic. The facts had been placed before the Political Officer and the Government of India must have been aware that abductions and slave-trading were being carried on in the interior, so the responsibility was theirs. I am aware that this disclosure may cause a certain amount of embarrassment in official quarters, but I consider that the British public should be made aware of practices, condemned by the League of Nations and decent-minded men and women, which still obtain in this humanitarian age in territories under the political control of the British Government.

2: O'Shea G-3 (1944-1945) 1947 MK4 Trucial Oman MK4

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## CHAPTER XVII

000 IN December, 1944, an R.A.F. pilot, flying a Lodestar aircraft between Salala, in Dhufar, and Muscat, went a long way off his course and made a forced landing at Sharjah. It was rumoured that he had crossed the eastern section of the Rub-al-Khali desert and had noticed several interesting things on the ground, including the wreckage of several aircraft, one of them ostensibly Italian. For many years I had been interested in the Great South Desert, as Major Cheeseman called it in his book *In Unknown Arabia*, and had read of its loneliness and vast extent in St. John Philby's *The Empty Quarter*, and Mr. Bertram Thomas's *Alarms and Excursions*. These fine books, together with Burton's translation of the *Arabian Nights*, Doughty's *Arabia Deserta*, and Lawrence's *Seven Pillars of Wisdom*, transported me in fancy from the easy chair of my London flat to the burning sands of the desert, but never in my wildest dreams did I imagine that I should ever stand on the threshold of the unexplored Rub-al-Khali.

In parenthesis, I think few people realize that it was one of Colonel Lawrence's ambitions to visit the Rub-al-Khali. Even when he was living in semi-retirement in his Dorset cottage among the rhododendrons at Wool, working out new designs for the fastest power boats ever to be conceived by engineers (improved prototypes of which were used by naval and Commando raiding parties in 1944), 'E. T. Shaw', as he called himself, expressed a desire to renew his acquaintance with the Arabs and study the archæological remains of the *Empty Quarter*. I first met Lawrence through a journalist friend in a Chancery Lane flat, and visited him several times at Cloud's Hill Cottage. The conversation was invariably about Arabia, and Lawrence was intensely interested in the legend of a 'lost city' which was said to exist in the middle of the Rub-al-Khali.

172 'I am convinced that the remains of an ancient Arab civilization are to be found in that desert,' he[1] once told me. 'I have been told by the Arabs that the ruined castles of the great King 'Ad, son of Kin'ad, have been seen by wandering tribes in the

[1] [Lawrence -- Analyst

region of Wabar. There is always some substance in these Arab 172
tales.'

The story of King 'Ad resembles the legends of King Arthur 173
and has been handed down by Arabian poets and singers through the centuries, and was told by Shahrazad to King Shahriyar in the *Thousand and One Nights.* Just as some historians believe that Arthur was no mere hero-king of myth, but an early British chief, so is it probable that 'Ad Ibn Kin'ad, a sheikh of considerable power in the dim past, ruled part of the Rub-al-Khali and built a city there.

This story has many detractors, amongst them Mr. St. John 172
Philby, a noted Arabian traveller and Fellow of the Royal Geographical Society, who claims in his book, *The Empty Quarter,* to have discovered the 'lost city' near Ibrahima, at a place called Al Hadida, which he identifies with Wabar. Yet all he found were the large craters formed by a meteor which fell here in prehistoric times, the shape and appearance of which, he supposes, gave rise to the legend of a buried city. Valuable as Mr. Philby's discovery undoubtedly was to the scientific world, his theory that these craters are the 'lost city' of the Rub-al-Khali is flimsy in the extreme and cannot be accepted by serious archæologists. In fact, in another part of his book he expresses the belief that the city of King 'Ad probably existed in Yeman or the Hadramaut.

The incident is referred to in Mr. Philby's introduction, in which he confesses his bitter disappointment at being beaten in the 'race for the Rub-al-Khali' by his old rival, Mr. Bertram Thomas, who crossed the desert a year before him in 1931.

There is no doubt that he believed that he alone had found the 'lost city', and was satisfied in his own mind that others which existed in the desert were not identifiable with that of King 'Ad's.

That such a city existed I have no doubt, and a great many intelligent Arabs are convinced of it. Whether it was the residence of King 'Ad is a matter for conjecture, but there are legends connecting Wabar with the modern Hilla, the site of ancient Babylon, and a great caravan route which transported frankincense, gold, pearls and spices to Iraq is said to have crossed the desert in this direction.

A great deal of nonsense has been said and written about the 000
Rub-al-Khali. The crossings of Mr. Philby and Mr. Thomas were notable achievements in the history of exploration, but several

080 other explorers have penetrated this desert in the past, including the Swiss, Burchardt, and Wrede, whilst few parts of its thousand miles' expanse have not been crossed by caravans through the centuries. I have met Bedouins who claimed to have made the journey from Baraimi to Aden via the Rub-al-Khali in a year, and in the section that I visited in 1945 there were signs of old tracks, wells and encampments which proved that it is not the unknown region that some travellers would make it out to be.

From the day of my arrival in Trucial Oman I had determined to visit the Rub-al-Khali directly the opportunity presented itself, and my interest was stimulated by the report that an R.A.F. pilot had flown over the Ar Rimal, or eastern section of this desert. 133 The Rub-al-Khali extends as far as Baraimi, south-west of which are vast areas which certainly have not been explored by Europeans, and which are known to few of the tribes, the reason for this being that some hundreds of square miles are entirely waterless.

000 I was fortunate in meeting this pilot who had made the flight, and in the mess one night he gave me an interesting account of his trip across the desert from Salala to Sharjah, a distance of nearly six hundred miles. On an Air Ministry map he traced the route he had approximately flown and excited my interest by pointing out a region near Al Maharadh, where, he said, he had noticed what appeared to be a small town. On descending to five hundred feet he had observed that the buildings were all ruins, and included several fort-like structures. They were situated on a hill rising steeply out of the desert, which he estimated to be about five hundred feet above sea-level. Before I left him we worked out the position of these ruins, which lie about twenty miles south of the Liwa desert and between 22° and 24° longitude and 52° and 54° latitude.

My fourteen days' leave fell due at the end of the month, and I was determined to spend it on a visit to the Rub-al-Khali and, if circumstances were favourable, in searching for the ruins of this city. Lieut. Schultz, who had accompanied me on my trip to Baraimi, was extremely eager to go with me when he heard of the project; by good fortune his local leave fell due at the same time and he was able to persuade his commanding officer, Major Raimer, to lend him a four-wheeled-drive truck for the journey.

Realizing that the British authorities would not give me their blessing for the excursion, we kept our destination a close secret and even the members of my staff at the Fort were not aware that

I intended to penetrate the Rub-al-Khali. As it happened, the ODO Political Officer, Captain Tandy, had just been posted to Kuwait and, as his successor, Captain Murphy, had not yet arrived from Bahrain, there was no one at the Residency whom I could officially inform of my intended visit, Jasim bin Muhammed Kadhawi, the Agent, being away on official business also. The next pressing question was the collection of supplies, equipment and guides, and this occupied the better part of a week. Lal Chand, the enterprising Indian merchant who supplied the Fort with provisions, came to our aid with tins of beef, fish, coffee, rice and condensed milk, whilst the R.A.F. stores kindly loaned us a theodolite, films, compasses and ground sheets.

Some difficulty was experienced in obtaining guides; two of my Askhari guards, Khofan bin Salim and Muhammed bin Hadi, who were fearless fighters with the scars of battle on their bodies, agreed to accompany us, and Suliman Beg, our Sindhi driver-mechanic, who was a Mohammedan, said he would come and be my cook-bearer and bottle-washer combined. None of these three knew the desert beyond Baraimi, however, and it was foolish to attempt the journey without guides. A few days before we were due to start the Sheikh of Al 'Ajman came to our rescue by offering to lend us one of his best trackers, a man of the Manasir tribe, who had been into the Rub-al-Khali several times. To these four were presently added a guide named Hamid bin Rahman, of the Ghafran section of the Murra tribe, two Bedouin guards from the sheikh's personal 'army', and Abdulla, an ex-slave, who would perform the menial tasks. Then Sheikh Raschid produced his trump card by offering to lend us a dozen of his best camels, since he was convinced that we could not make the journey by car.

In the end we decided to take the truck as far as Nimairiyah, fifty miles west of Baraimi, on the main caravan route to Qatar, and proceed thence by camel, taking an additional driver who could return to Sharjah and meet us again at Nimairiyah in ten days' time. This change in our plans meant that we should not be able to penetrate as far into the Rub-al-Khali as I had hoped, for we had planned to travel beyond Ibrahima as far west as Abu Bahr, in the centre of the Rub-al-Khali. Sheikh Raschid quickly showed us that this project was both fantastic and suicidal, for the terrain was such that no car would ever get through. His fears were proved right, for the country we encountered during our trip is quite impassable in some parts to any wheeled vehicle.

000 Instead of venturing a thousand miles into the Great South Desert, we were now restricted to three hundred at the most, for I was obliged to limit the outward journey to seven days; the trip from Sharjah, our starting point, to Baraimi and Nimairiyah, we proposed to make by car, and this would shorten the journey by a hundred miles, leaving us a maximum of two hundred to cover in the seven days at my disposal. On April 10th, 1945, we made our final arrangements, packed our tents and baggage, and set out for Baraimi on the following day. Accompanying Schultz and I in the truck were Suliman Beg, Khofan bin Salim and Muhammed bin Hadi, our Askharis; the guides, trackers and other members of Sheikh Raschid's party had left with the camels two days previously and were to meet us at Nimairiyah.

487 The journey to Baraimi,* which I had previously visited, was without incident and after a brief rest in the oasis for refreshment, we continued along the rough caravan route until the village of [361] Bahairan, south of Wadhi Talaif, was reached just before sunset. There were several good wells in the district, so we were able to replenish our water-bottles. The town appeared to be deserted, except for an encampment of Bedouins, who did not, however, approach us; we decided to push on a little further and spend the night in the desert. Five miles ahead we found a small depression covered with *neam* trees and camel thorn, and here we pitched our tents; Suliman Beg cooked a meal of rice, bully beef and chipatties over a wood fire, proving his mastery of the culinary arts to be no mere boast, and after coffee and a smoke we turned in.

At dawn we once again set out after a quick breakfast and followed what we thought was the caravan route; after a few miles the track disappeared in a shallow *wadhi* full of boulders and shrubs and, on taking our bearings, we found we were several miles off our course. After a delay of two hours we found the route once more and reached Nimairiyah shortly after ten o'clock. The caravan was waiting by one of the wells, and Hamid bin Rahman, the Murra guide, greeted us with enthusiasm. We had promised him a present of a hundred rupees, in addition to his pay, if he could lead us to the lost city, and he was so eager to claim his reward that I am sure its ruined towers and ramparts were already mirrored in his mind.

487 During the process of transferring our equipment from the car
361 to the baggage camels, we had our lunch and took some photographs of Nimairiyah, a typical Arab settlement built around a

*[From Sharjah -- Analyst]

small oasis with wells and a date garden. We were presently 487
joined by a crowd of Bedouins who peered at us in wonder, and 361
when Hamid informed them that we were proceeding into the
Rub-al-Khali they began to laugh. An aged *Badu*, who inspected [609]
our car with great interest, threw up his hands and shouted: 'Inshillah, but they must be mad!'

Mad or not, we were determined to proceed with our journey 487
without delay and, as soon as our Arabs has said their midday prayers—with a special invocation for the protection of Allah during our entry into the unknown—we mounted our camels and set forth. Musa, the driver who was to take the car back to Sharjah, gave us a cheerful send-off, betraying relief that he was not included in the party, and leaving the caravan route on our right we cantered over the desert in the direction of Latir, the site of a disused well.

After five hours of fairly comfortable travel we reached the 487
district known as Dhafra, which is composed of flat, waterless
desert relieved by occasional dunes and patches of *andab* grass. 133
We stopped here to allow the camels to graze and pitched our tents under the shoulder of a sandhill. We estimated that we were approximately a hundred miles south-west of Baraimi, and east of the Manasir desert. Schultz and I climbed to the top of a dune to watch the sun sink below the horizon; the desert stretched out on every side as far as the eye could see, and we appeared to be in the centre of a vast, treeless plain. A desert sunset is an unforgettable sight and quite unlike anything one sees in Europe; banners of scarlet and gold are unfurled in the sky, the clouds glow with a translucent iridescence, and, as the stars appear one by one, at first pale and glimmering, then with the brightness of white fire, a purple haze covers the desert. Shadows lengthen from the dunes until they merge in the twilight gloom and then, as if a curtain had been drawn across the world, night falls suddenly in folds of cold, black silence.

The next day we continued southwards through the Liwa
region to Idd, where we were fortunate to find an old well with [312]
water at ten fathoms. It lay in a bush-covered hollow of the dunes and the cameleers set to with a will to open up the shaft which had fallen in. Hamid reckoned that the well had not been used for many years and was surprised to find any water there. He gave me a taste of it from his goat's-skin, but it was horribly brackish and I was glad we had a good supply in our water-bottles.

487 The camels were exceedingly thirsty and greedily drank the dirty
133 grey water which Sayid bin Salih, the cameleer, brought to them in a bucket. There were a few crops of the *abal* bush for them to graze upon, and Hadi put some of these in his pot to boil with the rice, as a substitute for vegetables.

We had made good progress so far and were four days out from Sharjah; although it was early afternoon when we reached Idd the weather was hot and humid, the barometer registering 90° F. There was no point in tiring either the camels or ourselves, so we decided to encamp here for the night. The Arabs lay down under their tents and went to sleep, whilst Schultz and I explored the neighbourhood. As far as the eye could see the desert was bare of vegetation, with occasional dunes and ridges of hard sand and limestone conglomerate. In the distance, by the aid of our glasses, we could see the dim outlines of a peak or large hillock, which we estimated to be fifty miles due south of our camp.

The desert sloped gently away from Idd towards an unbroken steppe, littered with outcrops of volcanic rock and sandstone boulders. Two miles away we were surprised to find a shallow depression, about two hundred yards long, with pink sandstone walls rising to fifty feet in places. These cliffs were studded with tiny fossil shells, similar to the molluscs I had picked up on Sharjah
136 beach. The skeleton of an ibex, still covered with its skin, lay in
133 the sand beside a dead *abal* bush. The creature had evidently died from starvation. Of other forms of animal life there were no signs, and we did not even see an insect in this pit of death; on our way back to the camp, however, Schultz spotted a fork-tailed lark, which, according to Mr. Philby, is one of the few birds which inhabit the interior of the Rub-al-Khali.

Ahmed bin Aziz, one of the guides, greeted us with some excitement when we got back to the camp and said he had seen a bustard (*houbari*) flying overhead; he had fired at it, but it was too high to hit. Neither Schultz nor myself had heard a shot, which we supposed was due to the curious formation of the dunes, which had a trick of muffling sound. We had heard that there were so-called 'singing sands' in this region, which gave forth a booming sound, but the guides were unable to give us any information concerning this. In the camp we found a small mantis and two red spiders but, owing to the scarcity of vegetation, there was scarcely any animal life here.

Seated around our camp fire that night, Hamid burst into a 533
long and rather plaintive song about our journey, of which I give 539
a literal translation: 517

'Weary the traveller who leaves his home,
Saddened by comforts he has left behind;
Only the fool will brave the burning sun,
Searching for ghostly cities of the mind.

'Allah protect us from the djinns and fiends,
Spirits of evil who infest the dunes;
Let us return with haste to those we love,
And woo them with brave tales and manly tunes.'

We laughed loudly at this nostalgic chant, and the singer, eyeing us balefully for a moment, got up and retired to his tent. We had changed into Arab dress,* which is more comfortable in the desert than shorts and bush shirts, and there was little to distinguish either Schultz or myself from our companions. The scorching sun had burnt our faces a deep copper-brown, with white circles around our eyes, where they had been protected by sun-glasses. While Suliman prepared the evening meal, and Khofan bin Salim recited a long narrative poem which he had heard in Muscat—an Homeric tale of wifely infidelity—I read a chapter of the Koran.

Khofan was babbling on:

'Salaman heard—the Sea of his Soul was moved,
And bubbled up with jewels, and he said:
Oh Shah, I am the slave of Thy Desire,
Dust of the Throne ascending Foot am I.'

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*The Arab cloak, or outer garment, is known as an *abbas*, and is usually of coarse linen, white, black or brown, sometimes edged with gold braid. The head-dress is composed of a square of fine muslin or Kashmir wool, and is worn under the black-braided *aggal*. In the Trucial Oman Coast this head-dress is known as a *ghatrah*, but in the Nejd and other parts of Arabia it is also called a *kufieyh*. It is worn by folding the *ghatrah* into a triangle, the base of which is placed across the forehead, the cloth being kept in place by the *aggal*. The ends of the *ghatrah* offer protection against insects, dust and the rays of the sun, and during a sand-storm are sometimes drawn across the mouth to form a veil. 291

000 Curiously enough, I was reading a similar passage from the Koran, the Chapter of the Ant, which ran:

> 'It was said unto her, Enter the palace. And when she saw it, she imagined it to be a great water; and she discovered her legs, by lifting up her robes to pass through it. Whereupon Solomon said unto her, Verily this is a palace, evenly floored with glass. Then said the Queen, O Lord, verily I have dealt unjustly with my own soul, and I resign myself.'

The camels were getting restless and Hamid ordered the men to take them out to graze. Here two of the she-camels were milked and they growled viciously. Dusk was falling and we had an early supper and retired to bed. Two days remained to us for the journey westwards, and we were eager for what the future held in store.

487
133 We continued our journey the next day in a southerly direction, leaving on our left the site of an old Bedouin encampment known as Umm al 'Amad, which has a hillock and a single *samr* tree, but no wells that we could see. This region the Arabs call Al Maharadh. The sands were covered with curious round pebbles and black stones, some of them sharp enough to cut the camels' feet so that two of the beasts had to be bound. The going was very rough and we made slow progress, the distance for that day not exceeding twenty-five miles. There was no herbage for the camels to eat, so we had to feed them on the rations which Hamid had wisely provided for such a contingency. Our own supplies were running fairly low, and Schultz and I gave up the luxury of shaving and rationed ourselves to a pint of water each a day, which we supplemented with camels' milk.

Ten miles ahead we encountered a series of high sand ridges which made our progress even more cumbrous, and in the valleys between these dunes the sand was often dangerously soft and deep. Several times our camels' legs were submerged as far as their knees. I thought of the moving sands at Dahna, which Wrede, the explorer, had encountered over a century ago, and wondered whether these contained similar pitfalls. We decided not to go ahead, but to take a course due south-east in the direction of Qara. By so doing we were able to ride on the crest of the dunes, which run in a north-westerly curve, and avoid the dangerous sinking sands.

It was as well that we did so, for we were told later by a party 487
of Bedouins whom we encountered on the return journey, that 133
these sands get worse and worse towards the western desert and have swallowed up whole caravans of camels. We were fortunate from another point of view. When about ten miles from Qara, Abdulla, the ex-slave, who was walking beside the leading camel, suddenly gave a great shout. He pointed towards the shimmering horizon and, shading our eyes, we could just see the flat summit of a large hill which seemed to rise steeply out of the desert. It was one of those curious rock formations one sometimes sees in the Rub-al-Khali, and we decided to ride towards it. From the summit we might obtain a good view of our surroundings, for we had lost our bearings, and were not quite sure whether Qara lay behind or ahead of us.

At four o'clock in the afternoon, after a hard gallop across the sands, we reached the slopes of the hill, which was about five hundred feet above sand-level. The summit, which I estimated was a thousand yards long, was as flat as a billiard table, and the crumbling sandstone cliffs were precipitous and slippery. The camels were left grazing on some *harm* bushes at the foot of the hill, while Schultz, Hamid and I climbed the rock, reaching the summit after a stiff climb. It was not quite as flat on top as we had imagined. The sides were smooth and covered with a layer of sand, but in the centre there was a large bowl-shaped depression with gently-sloping sides. The slopes were profuse with vegetation, including stunted *gharf* and *samr* bushes, and a short, dry grass with razor-
like edges. What took our breath away, however, was the sight 172
of a derelict town at the base of this bowl.

The buildings covered about two acres, and were surrounded by a low wall of crumbled sandstone blocks, which at one time had been much higher. Most of the buildings were a mass of rubble, so that it was difficult to distinguish houses or streets, but two of the towers were still standing; these measured thirty feet in circumference and were forty feet high. The tops were not crenellated like the fort towers of Oman, but smooth and unembellished, with small lookouts through which one had a good view of the surrounding desert. The walls themselves were in places four feet thick, the stone blocks—the largest of which measured two feet in length and eighteen inches in width—being held together by a rough mortar made of gypsum and clay.

We asked Hadi how old he thought the city was, and he pulled

172 at his dirty grey beard before answering. 'Praise Allah, but it must be a thousand years,' he answered. 'In all my days I have never seen such a city as this; it is not built as we Arabs build, but is more like your foreign buildings.'

Being neither archæologists nor historians, we could not conjecture the age or the probable origins of this strange town on the hilltop. None of our Arabs had heard of it before, and it is not near any of the caravan routes or Bedouin encampments. Small lakes of water lay at the flat end of the bowl, suggesting that there is no lack of moisture during the rainy season; this would explain the abundance of vegetation we found growing there. One curious feature of the ruins were the large circular stone discs, the size of a cartwheel, with a hole in the centre with rays, roughly hewn with some blunt instrument, extending like spokes to the rim. These discs were composed of a hard white limestone and were about four inches in thickness across the rim. Hamid also found a piece of broken black pottery, with a high glaze, which I took back with me and presented to the Sheikh of Al 'Ajman.

Was this, I wondered, the 'lost city' of the Rub-al-Khali, whose whereabouts has for centuries been a theme of fascinating speculation amongst explorers and travellers? If it were not the fabled seat of the legendary King 'Ad, then perhaps it was the seat of a lost tribe which had wandered across the desert and made its home far from the haunts of men on the top of an isolated hill. The truth we may never know, but any archæologist who wishes to follow in our footsteps and find this city for himself will doubtless be able to estimate its approximate age and reconstruct the plan of its buildings; excavation may even yield the secret of its origin and bring to light evidences of the tribe which built it in the dim past.

That night we encamped at the foot of the hill, the Arabs climbing to the top to obtain water and grass for the camels. Suliman refused to go up, however, insisting that the ruins were haunted by a malevolent djinn. To banish his fears we lit a huge fire of brushwood, for the night was cold, and smoked our pipes in content. I for one felt that our journey had been worth while and that we had accomplished something which no other foreign travellers had succeeded in doing.

487 In the morning, when the haze had lifted, we had a closer view of the desert from the summit, and Schultz, looking through his field-glasses, observed a clump of trees which he thought might be

Qara. This indeed it turned out to be, Qara lying ten miles due 487 west of the ruins. We set out on the return journey soon after breakfast, feeling refreshed and energetic and, turning due north, passed through Bil Hanna on our way to Umm al 'Amad. Here we came upon our old tracks and the next day branched north-east to Qutuf, a distance of thirty miles, leaving Idd ten miles to the north.

The journey back was uneventful; the desert was much firmer and less rocky than had been our previous route and, the camels being able to travel at a good pace, we reached Wahaida on the third day; here we found a well, with brackish water at twelve fathoms. Schultz shot a bustard which was feeding in some scrub and we roasted it for our evening meal. The journey north to Nimairiyah occupied two days, the route passing through Hadhi, where we found two disused wells; the thirty-five miles between Hadhi and Nimairiyah were desolate in the extreme, without a sign of water or vegetation, and we were exhausted and parched by the time we reached Nimairiyah, on the fifth day after leaving Qara.

Nimairiyah was reached at five o'clock in the afternoon, and there was no sign of the car. We spent the night in an encampment 000 of Bedouins, who were amazed to hear that we had been as far west as the Al Maharadh country, which, they said, is wild and dangerous. They were most hospitable, however, and gave us dates, rice and coffee. At eight o'clock the next morning Musa, our driver, appeared with the car; he explained that he had been detained at Baraimi, where he had had a breakdown. Knowing that he had relatives there, we smiled at this explanation. Our baggage was soon transferred from the camels to the car and, after paying off our Arab friends and bidding them farewell, we set off on the way back to Baraimi and Sharjah.

The memory of this expedition will remain with me for the rest of my life; it was the only form of exploration I have ever been able to undertake, and I could be well satisfied with the result. Had I been accompanied by an archæologist, or been equipped with tools and scientific instruments, there is no doubt that my discovery would have been a much more valuable record than it actually is. Unfortunately, I was pressed for time and was unable to undertake any kind of excavation. Had one the opportunity to re-visit Arabia and form an expedition composed of experts, I have no doubt that the ruins of Qara would yield surprising secrets to the world.

# CHAPTER XVIII

## *L'ENVOI.*

000 A MONTH after my return from the Rub-al-Khali expedition, I was taken ill for the second time with a fever accompanied by a high temperature. The medical officer was suspicious of a pulmonary infection, although blood tests failed to reveal tubercular baccili, and on his advice I was eventually invalided home and, seven months later, out of the Service. Thus I was, unfortunately, prevented from making further expeditions into the desert, as I had planned to do. My visits during the following weeks were confined to official tours to Dubai and Ras-al-Khaimah. Early in June I was informed that a passage to England had been obtained for me in a Short 'C' class flying-boat, and I made arrangements to hand over to my successor, William Quekett, who had arrived at Sharjah a week previously.

My stay in Arabia had been all too short and there were many things I had left undone; I had not visited Nejd, or the domains of King Ibn Saud, nor had I been able to cross the Shamailiyah mountains and explore the greener side of the peninsula where Muscat lies. Yet 1944–45 were fateful years in the world's history, and I felt that my tour of duty as Station Manager at Sharjah and Dubai had not been without compensation. I was one of the 'lonely men' described by *The Times* of 6th January, 1945, 'whose job is to see the mails through, to be part of the chain which is transporting necessities to the fighting men, and to serve along routes carrying ministers, governors, service chiefs, and hundreds of others on missions vital to the nation's war effort,' and at least I had the satisfaction of knowing that I had done this part of my work satisfactorily. We had not suffered a single casualty, not one aircraft had crashed, and mails, though occasionally delayed or mislaid—through no fault of ours, however—never once failed to reach their destination. The war was over and my job was done.

The week prior to my departure I devoted to paying farewell visits to the sheikhs and other Arab friends who had given me their hospitality and friendship. Presents were showered upon me, varying from pearl studs to gazelle skins, but I valued above all else the honorary Sheikhdom of Khan which Sultan bin Saqr bestowed upon me in memory of our friendship. In his letter to me, in which he asked me if I would consider the acceptance of this title, he addressed me as 'dear brother, Sheikh Raiman bin Sh'ea', and expressed his grief that ill health had obliged me to leave Oman. 000

A feast in my honour was given in the palace at Sharjah three days before I left, and Sultan bin Saqr presented me with a gold dagger which had belonged to his father. After the feast we repaired to the guest chamber, where he made me sit beside him while he addressed his chiefs and nobles on my various 'virtues'. It is a rare honour for any foreigner to be made a sheikh, and I know of no other Englishman who has had this privilege conferred upon him except Colonel Lawrence, although I believe Mr. St. John Philby was made a Wazir, or Viceroy, to King Ibn Saud. Oddly enough, this is the third chieftaincy that I hold. In 1942, whilst acting as Administrative Officer of a British Flying Training School at Ponca City, Oklahoma, I was elected an honorary Chief of the Kaw Tribe of American Indians, a branch of the great Osage Nation; I am also an hereditary chief of the O'Shea sept of Eire.

As I said my farewells at the palace, Sultan bin Saqr and his nobles kissed me on the forehead, and gave me the blessings of Allah for my journey. In the square fronting the palace the sheikh's 'army' was drawn up on either side of my car, and as I drove away they presented arms and fired several volleys into the air. The Arabs never use blank cartridges, and one bullet passed through the hood of the car, but one took this in good part. When they are excited they invariably fire in all directions, and it is quite customary for someone to get hurt.

The night before I left Sharjah, a farewell dinner was held at the Fort, attended by several members of the R.A.F. and American officers' messes, as well as by the commanding officers of the various units which composed the camp. Later I visited the Indian mess, and was obliged to listen to a long address in my honour as well as some Indian songs, which were not appreciated by the Fort pai dog, who insisted in joining in the chorus with a plaintive howl. The next day, Haider, my bearer, to whose faithful service I pay tribute, laid my clothes out for the last time and looked as if he would burst into tears; this calamity was prevented by the gift of a substantial sum of money.

000 One last look round the Fort which had been my desert home for two summers, and I was on my way across the ten miles stretch of sands to Dubai, where the flying-boat awaited us. The Khan Bahadur Abdur bin Razzak, who had been on a short visit to his relatives in Sharjah, was returning to his home in Kuwait and, to my delight, accompanied me as far as Bahrain.

We took off against a twenty-miles-an-hour wind and climbed rapidly, the rest-house looking like a doll's house and the creek a mere elongated puddle in the desert. Palm trees became dots of green, past which the caravan routes meandered like faint lines on the sand, and in a short while we were crossing the familiar red peaks of the Ruus-al-Jibal and so out into the Gulf, which was as translucent and ultramarine as ever. At Bahrain the Khan Bahadur took his leave and, after a few words in the rest-house with my confrère, Captain 'Tony' Welch, now assistant Station Manager at Hurn, we resumed our journey on a northwards course for Habanyieh. Within three days I was back in England.

Since my return political incidents have occurred in the Middle East, notably in Palestine, which may have given the British public a somewhat unfavourable opinion of the Arabs. To the best of my information, these disturbances have not spread to the Trucial Oman Coast, and are largely based, at the moment, on the question of Jewish immigration. I have always borne in mind, however, the words uttered by a wise and cultured Arab whose house I used to visit and who had a wide knowledge of world affairs:

'It is not the Jewish question alone,' he confided, 'which is of concern to the Arab peoples. It is true that the Jews are better business people than we are, and we fear their competition; political agitators and foreign agents are using the Jewish question as a lever to force their demands. Do not lose sight of the fact, however, that there are other and deeper causes underlying the Arab revolt.'

My informant, who is closely connected with the Arab League, explained that the youth of the Middle Eastern countries had awakened to a new sense of national pride and responsibility. 'Times have changed; the Arab of to-day is politically-conscious, and he resents the occupation and exploitation of his land by foreigners whose religion and morals he despises, and who maintain a higher standard of living than his own, at his expense.'

This is the Arab point of view, and perhaps there is some justification for it. The tendency of British and other foreign powers in the past has been to regard the Middle East as the exclusive play- 000 ground for industrial enterprise, but the Arabs have not been allowed to share in the profits. Rather have they been treated as inferiors and made to feel that their civilization was beneath the contempt of the white man. The British are by no means unpopular as a race in Arabia or in other parts of the Middle East, and there is much about our 'way of life' that the Arabs admire; but they feel that we have no justification in seizing their territory merely because it contains oil and other resources that we consider essential for our industrial machine. They resent our benevolently tyrannical form of colonial government; they resent our policing of Arab cities, our exclusive segregation in zones which puts them outside the pale and, above all, they resent our unwillingness to recognize their right to political independence in their own countries.

The Arab question has become a world question and is no longer the sole concern of the British Empire. It can be settled only by a full conference of the Allied Powers, including France and Russia, at which all the Arab countries are represented. There are 38,000,000 Arabs in the Middle East, Egypt and Africa, a small people compared with the number of Mohammedans in the world, but these Arabs believe that they have the divine right to govern Islam.

Britain cannot do without a place in Arabia, which is the main overland route to India. Can Arabia do without Britain? Arabian fanaticism, so easy to kindle, is difficult to calm, and already there is talk of negotiating with Russia which for many years has cast covetous eyes on the Persian Gulf, and inviting her to develop the vast oil resources of Arabia. There is a tendency among sections of Arabian and Iraqi youth to favour the Soviet ideal, with its religious and racial tolerances, and its abolition of class distinctions. I have heard Iraqis and Assyrians openly declare their zeal for Russia's political philosophy, and express a desire to see their countries absorbed within the U.S.S.R.

Arab fanatics and *agents provocateurs* employed by interested foreign powers have deliberately played upon these feelings, and have inflamed the nationalistic inspirations of thousands of Arabs who desire no foreign domination whatsoever, but who wish to be left in peace. The course of the British Government is a far from easy one, but if widespread terrorism and even a 'Holy War' of some magnitude are to be avoided, the only lasting panacea is international collaboration.

000 The small fortresses on the Gulf of Oman and the Pirate Coast, fortifications once under the nominal control of the Ottoman Empire and, since the Anglo-Turkish agreement of 1913, under Great Britain's domination, are the 'gateways through which Britain enters the hinterland', to quote Paul Morand in *The Road to India*. Britain is reconditioning the ancient tracks leading towards Muscat and Petra. By flying over the desert our explorers have re-discovered the hidden cisterns from which the Israelites drank; they are also finding the hog-backed tap-holes said to slope in opposite directions, which betray the presence of mineral oil in Persia and Arabia.

Vast Arabia has surrendered all her keys to the British Empire: Jiddah, Aden, Basrah and Kuwait. Shall we have the vision, in co-operation with our Allies, to realize Lawrence's dream and create an independent Arabian Empire? If we openly side with the Zionist colonists and allow their persecutors to be defeated, our ally of to-day may possibly become our enemy of to-morrow. The future of the British Empire, perhaps the peace of the world, may depend upon our handling of this situation.

Regret is sometimes expressed by romanticists that the aeroplane and the motor-car have banished mystery and adventure from life by opening up the inaccessible places of the world to the tourist. It is said that modern forms of transport have 'made the world smaller', meaning, no doubt, that time and space have been inter-related by speed. This may be true in the sense that, to give one example, Karachi can be reached from London in twenty-four hours or less, whereas ten years ago this journey took nearly a week. Yet surely the effect of this increase of speed has been to 'enlarge' the world, rather than to shrink it?

To-day man has one objective in travel—to get from one point to another in the shortest possible time. The intervening space between these points is no longer of interest; vast deserts, mountain ranges, jungles and plains—these are merely the picturesque background against which, or above which, he moves.

In the past, when a network of roads, canals and sea lanes formed an integral part of world economic expansion, the colonial powers were obliged to take an active interest in the territories through which these communications passed. To-day, this is no longer necessarily so. There are vast tracts of the earth's surface which are relatively useless to man, and unless these can be made to produce

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oil, minerals or vegetation, they are likely to be neglected and forgotten.

It is unlikely that great, waterless deserts like the Rub-al-Khali or the Sahara (which is said to be increasing every hour), or the barren Pamirs, will ever be exploited by man, or their inhospitable interiors ever be penetrated by arterial roads. Strategic points on the route to India will continue to be guarded, though increasingly by air power, and the old, desolate lands will be left to the company of the sun and the stars.

The Arabs? Their future is uncertain, and whether they remain a primitive, backward race, divided politically as they are geographically, depends very largely on the attitude adopted by Great Britain and the United States to the Arab question. As that great Arabian scholar and soldier, Colonel T. E. Lawrence, says in his essay on *The Changing East*:*

'The question of a unity of the Arabic peoples in Asia is yet clouded. In the past it has never been a successful experiment, and the least reflection will show that there are large areas, especially of Arabia, which it would be unprofitable ever to administer. The deserts will probably remain, in the future as in the past, the preserves of inarticulate philosophers. . . . It may well be that Arab unity will come of an overwhelming conviction of the Arab peoples that their national prosperity demands it.'

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* From *Oriental Assembly*, edited by A. W. Lawrence, 1939.

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## ABBREVIATIONS

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|---|---|
| J.A.S.B. | Bengal Asiatic Society's Journal |
| Bull.S.G. | *Bulletin de la Societe de Geographie* |
| G.J. | Geographical Journal |
| J.Bo.Br.R.A.S. | Journal of the Bombay Branch of the Royal Asiatic Society |
| J.R.A.S. | Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society |
| J.R.G.S. | Journal of the Royal Geographical Society |
| Pr.R.G.S. | Proceedings of the Royal Geographical Society |
| Tr.Bo.G.S. | Transactions of the Bombay Geographical Society |

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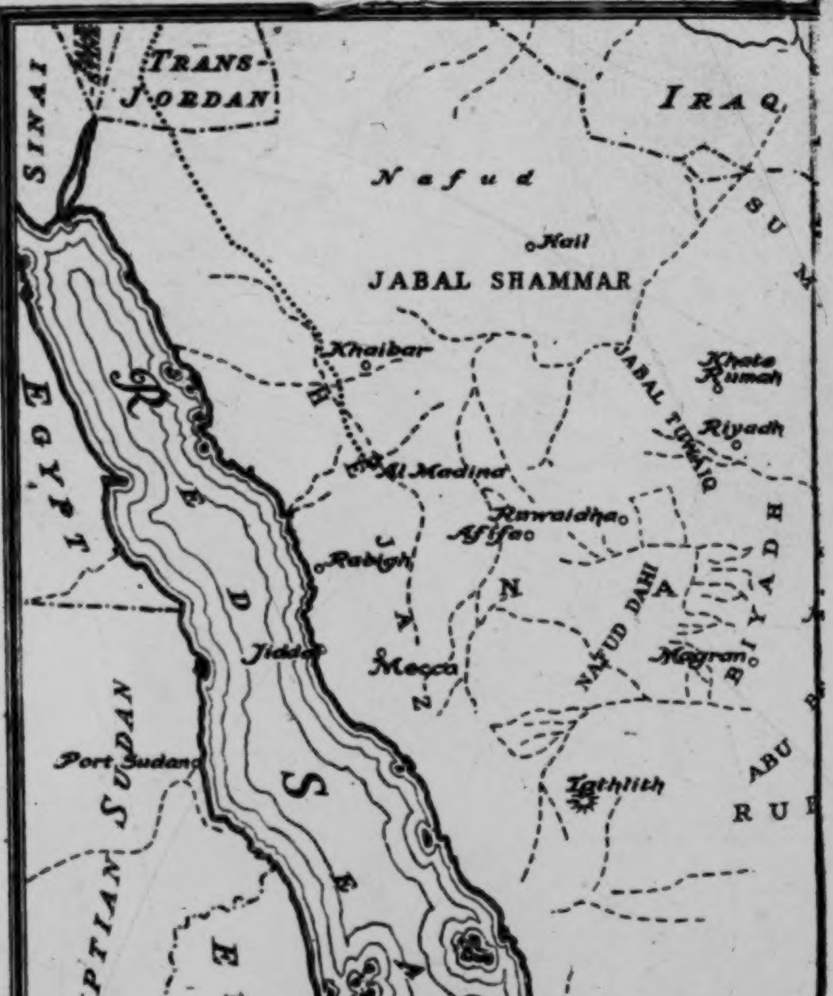
TRANS-JORDAN
SINAI
IRAQ
Nafud
Hail
JABAL SHAMMAR
Khaibar
Khafs Rumah
Riyadh
JABAL TUWAIQ
Al Madina
Ruwaidha
Afif
Rabigh
HEJAZ
NEJD
NAFUD DAHI
Jidda
Mecca
Nagran
BIYADH
ABU
RU
EGYPT
RED SEA
Port Sudan
ANGLO-EGYPTIAN SUDAN
Tathlith
ERITREA
Massawa
Al Hudaida
YAMAN
Aden
GULF
ABYSSINIA

End Paper A

2: O'Shea G-3 (1944-1945) 1947 MK4 Trucial Oman MK4

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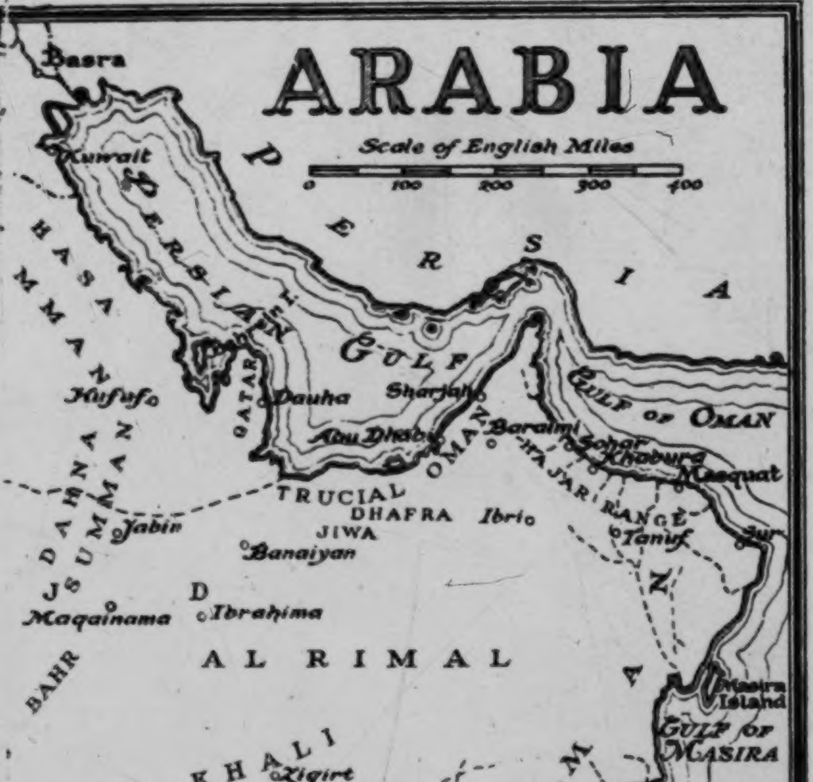
ARABIA
Scale of English Miles
0
100
200
300
400
Basra
Kuwait
PERSIAN GULF
PERSIA
HASA
Hufuf
QATAR
Dauha
Sharjah
Abu Dhabi
TRUCIAL OMAN
Baraimi
HAJAR RANGE
Sohar
Khabura
Masquat
GULF OF OMAN
Sur
DHAFRA
Ibri
JIWA
Tanuf
Jabin
Banaiyan
DAHNA
SUMMAN
Maqainama
Ibrahima
AL RIMAL
BAHR
B AL KHALI
OMAN
Masira Island
GULF OF MASIRA
Ziqirt
Shanna
Khaur Dhahiya
Sanquira Bay
Thamut
Kuria Maria Bay
Shista
JABAL QUARA
DHUFAR
Murbat
Qamy Bay
HADHRAMAUT
Mukalla
ARABIAN SEA
OF ADEN
Socotra
S.J.D.

End Paper B